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# LANGUAGE OF THE SELF



# LANGUAGE OF THE SELF

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FRITHJOF SCHUON

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*Translated by*

MARCO PALLIS

MACLEOD MATHESON

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His Holiness the Jagadguru  
Śrī Śaṅkarācārya Svāmīgal  
of Kāñcī Kāmakoti Pīṭha  
who has kindly accepted the offering*

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## FOREWORD

“Internally ” every religion is the doctrine of the one Self and its earthly manifestation, as also the way leading to the abolition of the false self or the way of the mysterious reintegration of our “ personality ” in the celestial Prototype. (p. 234)

It is a matter of singular satisfaction to the present writer to be associated with this book, the first publication in India of a class of writings which, if not so well known in this country, has nevertheless contributed in a unique way to the true understanding of Hinduism in the West. This is a class of writings different from the more widely known one of the ‘ Orientalists ’, but may be considered the consummation of the work which these ‘ Orientalists ’ had done since their discovery of Sanskrit or the East by editing and translating Eastern classics and tracing the development of the different branches of Oriental thought. To adopt the language of the *Muṇḍaka*, all that they have done may be called the *aparā vidyā*, while the class of writings dealt with here may be deemed the *parā vidyā*. An eminent figure who easily passed from the former to the latter <sup>1</sup> and who is not only well known in this country but widely adored is Ananda K. Coomaraswamy. Another name that comes in this line is that of the French savant René Guénon, the quintessence of whose teachings Coomaraswamy himself brings together in his essay,

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<sup>1</sup> Like Truth, the same *sādhaka* may have modes and levels; and one can pass from one kind of study to the other without looking down upon the other, or fearing the loss of caste by mixing with those of another school, or being accused of having as if two distinct brains.

“Eastern Wisdom and Western Knowledge”. Guénon’s *Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines* and *Man and his Becoming according to the Vedānta* are now much-marked books in Indian libraries. Yet another member of the elite of authentic exponents in the West of Eastern wisdom is Frithjof Schuon whom it is the privilege of the present writer to introduce to our readers here.

Schuon, who had associations with Guénon, is German and French by culture and Swiss by residence. His writings, which are in French, have appeared, comparatively recently, in English—*Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Faber and Faber, 1953), *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts* (Faber and Faber, 1954), *Gnosis—Divine Wisdom* (John Murray, 1959). The present collection of his essays has been translated by two close associates of his, who have, like him, received initiation in Oriental traditions, Marco Pallis, author of *Peaks and Lamas*, and Macleod Matheson, translator of Schuon’s *Spiritual Perspectives*. This is the first time that a collection of Schuon’s essays is published in this country in whose heritage of wisdom he is immersed and in the interpretation—*manana*—of which he has ever been engaged. It is but appropriate that Ganesh & Co. who have published the expositions by another foreign savant and *sādhaka*, Arthur Avalon, of another aspect of Indian traditional *upāsana*, the *Śākta*, are bringing out this volume. Nothing is perhaps more significant or has climaxed this effort in a more befitting manner than the fact that His Holiness Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, Jagadguru on the Kāñcī Kāmakoti Pīṭha, has been pleased to accept the dedication of this book to him; the orthodoxy and authenticity of Schuon’s exposition stand in need of no further testimony.

In the foregoing lines the words Tradition and Orthodoxy—quite unfashionable these days—have been used. At the outset a certain distinctiveness and distinction were

also claimed for the class of writings to which those presented here belong. What are the chief features of their approach? Firstly, these writings bring out the fact that underlying the different religions of the world there is a common tradition and a basic unity. To quote Schuon, 'explicitly to practise one religion is implicitly to practise them all' (*Gnosis*, p. 33). This common tradition is the 'gnosis or the *philosophia perennis* which is the connecting link between the different religious languages' (*ibid.*, p. 27).

Secondly, while Truth is one, Revelation or Tradition or Form is naturally diverse, thanks to the infinity of divine possibility (*ibid.*, p. 29). While orthodoxy which represents divine necessity is the conforming to this basic gnosis, originality, which represents divine freedom,<sup>1</sup> comprehends the different forms this gnosis puts forth at different times or in different parts of the world. '... the diverse revelations do not really contradict one another, since they do not apply to the same receptacle and since God never addresses the same message to two or more receptacles. . . .' (*Gnosis*, pp. 29-30). In the words of Guénon (*Introduction*, p. 201), 'differences in doctrines, in order to be legitimate, can only be a mere matter of adaptation, modifying the more or less external forms of expression but in no wise touching the principles themselves';<sup>2</sup> '... according to men's varying capacity', God 'taught them at one time one thing and at another time another, as circumstances required'.<sup>3</sup> '... Every traditional form is superior<sup>4</sup> to the others in a particular respect and it is

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<sup>1</sup> p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Schuon, *Transcendent Unity*, p. 124: 'Every tradition is necessarily an adaptation. . . .'

<sup>3</sup> p. 101.

<sup>4</sup> *Transcendent Unity*, p. 50. To be more precise one should rather say that every traditional form *specialises* in a particular aspect. Cf. p. 68: 'That one enunciation may be less direct in its form than

this characteristic which in fact indicates the sufficient reason for the existence of that form.'

Thirdly, while a search in the writings of the different religions of the world has shown that this gnosis or knowledge of the Self forms the core of all the religions, it is in Hinduism that it is found in a most pronounced form and has never been forgotten. Also, the Hindu heritage is precious for another reason: it is not only 'the most ancient of the living traditional forms' but 'it possesses a certain superiority or centrality with respect to later forms' (*Transcendent Unity*, p. 51).<sup>1</sup> 'Hinduism has the faculty of combining all the perspectives which elsewhere are mutually exclusive.' While combining through the doctrine of *adhikāra-bheda* and *ruci* (spiritual temperament) the different perspectives (*darśanas*), 'Hinduism does not lose sight of unity; it has a tendency to see unity in diversity and in each element of this diversity.' (*Spiritual Perspectives*, pp. 66, 68).

Fourthly, the highest of these perspectives is Gnosis, the metaphysic of the Self, the *Vedānta*. 'That the way of Knowledge, *jñāna-mārga*, is among spiritual ways the highest, and in a still more ultimate sense, that it is the spiritual way as such, the one in which all other ways finally must merge, is a fundamental truth to which all traditional teachings bear witness either openly or else by implication.' Of 'those doctrines and methods that keep closest to true knowledge as the "highest" ways open to man', 'the Hindu *Vedānta* provides an example that conforms in its presentation, as near as conceivably possible, to the goal it sets itself, which is Deliverance total and unqualified.'<sup>2</sup> As to Śaṅkara and the Sufis, to these writers too, knowledge alone delivers. The doctrine of

another is no proof whatever of a lesser wisdom but solely of a lesser receptivity on the part of the particular environment.'

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 107, *fn.*, ' . . . Hinduism represents the Primordial Tradition. . . '

<sup>2</sup> p. 46.

*Bhakti*, Hindu or Christian, does not contradict that of *Jñāna*, for 'the conceptions of Rāmānuja are contained in those of Śaṅkara and are transcended by them'. 'Rāmānuja affirms against Śaṅkarācārya truths which the latter never denied on their own level.' (p. 24). Like faith,<sup>1</sup> devotion is a pre-condition of knowledge; there have been no greater hymnists in India than Śaṅkara; for, to one who has realised the Self, it is more natural than not, as the *Bhāgavata* says, to be singing of the Lord.<sup>2</sup> Not only Rāmākrishna, but many a forebear of his has been this *bhaktajñānin*. Also, when the *Upaniṣad* says of the Supreme Self 'yam evaiṣa vṛṇute tena labhyaḥ tasyaiṣa ātmā vṛṇute tanūm svām', there is, as it were, a synthesis of *Jñāna* and *Bhakti*. It is in this light that statements such as that of St. Macarius of Egypt, 'Love is inseparable from knowledge', are to be understood. Between different approaches, e.g., *Bhakti* and *Jñāna*, it is, therefore, not a question of error and truth, but one of lesser truth and greater truth<sup>3</sup> or of different gradations of the universal reality (*Transcendent Unity*, p. 38).<sup>4</sup>

Fifthly, between the subject to be realised which is *Sat*, *Cit* and *Ānanda* and the objective world superimposed on it, 'there is interposed a direct objectivation of the subject' which mediates in the re-integration, the trinity of the *avatāra*, the *guru* and the revelation or *mantra*<sup>5</sup>. 'The Absolute reveals

<sup>1</sup> *Śraddhāvān labhate jñānam*, *Gītā*, IV. 39. Cf. 'It is for certain men who have been allowed to pass from faith to gnosis . . .' (Clement of Alexandria).

<sup>2</sup> See Ch. XLII, 'From Bhakti to Jñāna and Back' in the *Call of the Jagadguru*, lectures by the present Śaṅkarācārya of Kāñcī, Ganesh & Co.

<sup>3</sup> p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> 'Reality affirms itself by degrees, but without ceasing to be "one", the inferior degrees of this "affirmation" being absorbed, by metaphysical integration or synthesis, into the superior degrees . . . Furthermore Being Itself, which is none other than the "Personal God", is in its turn surpassed by the "Impersonal" . . .' (*Transcendent Unity*, p. 53).

<sup>5</sup> p. 18.

itself also, to the same sage, in an objective manner, by springing up suddenly in the mind in the form of sacred words; and the Absolute reveals itself also in the giving of inspired Texts which are to be the support of life and of spiritual realisation to an entire civilisation; in such a case the Absolute never reveals itself in subjective mode, except in the case of certain *Avatāras* whose body and mind manifest the self in a manner eminently more direct than with the ordinary sage . . .’ (p. 57).

Sixthly, the East and Hinduism in particular are noteworthy for preserving not only this tradition of gnosis, but what is very important today, the ‘techniques of realisation’ (p. 229). For ‘knowledge is not merely a matter of right theory . . . but is something to be “actualised” with the help of a method running parallel to the doctrine . . .’ (p. 48). Foremost among these techniques is *Yoga*—to which Schuon devotes a chapter in this book—which as described by Patañjali includes the virtues and that unique mode called *japa*, which runs like a golden thread through *Karma*, *Bhakti* and *Jñāna*, and assimilates the former two to the last.

Lastly, ‘as the “spiritual technique” is essentially the art of concentration’ (p. 89), the traditional ideology favours art, which in origin was the imitation of divine act or the analogy used by revelation for exegesis, ‘as a direct aid to spirituality’ (p. 108); ‘the spiritual efficacy of aesthetic supports is in the very nature of things’, for ‘apart from the intrinsic value of beauty’ ‘the efficacy of art is to be found in the unifying power of aesthetic experience’.<sup>1</sup> As he says in his *Spiritual Perspectives*: ‘There is something in our intelligence which wants to live at rest, something in which the conscious and unconscious meet in a kind of passive activity, and it is this element to which the lofty and easy language of

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Nāda-yoga, pp. 36-55, Introduction to the *Spiritual Heritage of Tyāgarāja*, Ramakrishna Mission Students’ Home, Madras.

art speaks. The language is lofty because of the spiritual symbolism of its form and the nobility of its style; it is easy because of the aesthetic mode of assimilation' (p. 29).

Guénon, who was the pioneer to expound these ideas, expressed himself forcefully and decisively; at the same time his style was clear, straight and succinct. In Frithjof Schuon, we have his commentator, his *bhāṣya-kāra*, if we may say so, who delights more in analysis, dialectics and aphoristic enunciations.<sup>1</sup> He develops further the topics—orthodoxy and heterodoxy, metaphysic and intellectuality, esoterism and exoterism, East and West, etc.—which Guénon had dealt with earlier. Naturally while examining these concepts more intensely, Schuon has to go into many a detail. For example, while on the question of the value of traditions, one would naturally expect the question of accretions and decay to be tackled. The explanations which the author seeks may not all be satisfactory, *e.g.*, on the spread of Buddhism or Islam in India (*Transcendent Unity*, pp. 107-110).<sup>2</sup> But in these and other similar discussions, the author's critical acumen shows that the doctrine of traditionalism does not mean credulousness nor turning a blind eye to certain defects caused by the historical conditions,<sup>3</sup> time-cycle and *puruṣa-doṣa* (defects which human nature is always prone to)<sup>4</sup> that might overlay and obscure or lead to some aberrations in a tradition.

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<sup>1</sup> While the present volume of his essays has many examples of this last mentioned category, his *Spiritual Perspectives* is almost fully in that form.

<sup>2</sup> What is said on p. 110 here is hardly correct; it is not as if Hinduism or Śaṅkara did away with Buddhism in India; it was Muslim expansion which dealt the death blow by destroying in India, as outside also, the Buddhistic monasteries.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Ch. VIII, "The Meaning of Race", p. 199, on the tendency of the traditional worlds to exaggeration, illogicality and facile prejudices. See also his *Transcendent Unity*, p. 38 on traditions which outlive their usefulness.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Spiritual Perspectives*, p. 20, 'Abuses are in human nature and especially so, when human nature is expressed in a collectivity.'



While in discussions on such questions, which cannot be carried on without getting involved in the historical method, differences of opinion are inevitable, on the timeless aspects of Tradition and Knowledge one would find in these pages interpretation which is illuminating and, with reference to the Hindu doctrines of *Vedānta*, *Yoga*, etc., perfectly authentic. Chapter VI here, read along with the corresponding chapters in Schuon's two other books, forms an important contribution which adds to Coomaraswamy's exposition of sacred art and traditional æsthetic; particularly noteworthy is the author's effort here to emancipate art from evaluation based on period, environment and movement and from the obsession of originality and the notion that for a genius to flower forth, it is necessary to make innovations. While the long chapter on the principle of distinction in social order puts forth a reasoned explanation of Caste so far as the Hindu tradition is concerned, the next on the meaning of Race underlines the leading endowments and originality, with special reference to spiritual inheritance, of the different peoples of the world, and evaluates them on the basis of the three *guṇas*—*Sattva*, *Rajas* and *Tamas*. "The Sacred Pipe of the Red Indians" (Ch. IX) exposes ideas which show the universality of the traditional wisdom and would be of special interest to Hindus for their parallels in the *Veda* and *Upaniṣad*.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the greatest gain from this study of world religions is the discovery of their underlying unity<sup>2</sup> and of the fact that they are but diverse 'paths that lead to the same summit'. It is also clear that this unity could lie only in the doctrine of gnosis, for it is knowledge that has no history. The realisation of this truth would obviate the evangelic obsession of certain faiths, which by admixture of violence, exploitation or

<sup>1</sup> See especially pp. 202, 205, 208.

<sup>2</sup> See also 'How Can Christian and Non-Christian Religions Co-operate?' by F. Heiler, Marburg, *Hibbert Journal*, LLI, January, 1954.

corruption of one kind or another or by dilution of the teaching, carry out their expansionism. As Aldous Huxley says: 'Like any other form of imperialism, theological imperialism is a menace to permanent world peace. The reign of violence will never come to an end until, first, most human beings accept the same true philosophy of life; until, second, this perennial philosophy is recognised as the highest factor common to all the world religions; until, third, the adherents of every religion renounce the idolatrous time-philosophies, with which, in their own particular faith, the perennial philosophy of eternity has been overlaid. . . .'<sup>1</sup> This does not mean a watering down of faith or the growth of a religious indifference; it is only a curative of sectarianism. Every religion is unique and the aspirant devoted to it should essay in it with that faith but when he has reached the goal, he no longer sees any diversity. This has been affirmed so far as the manifold perspectives within the Indian tradition are concerned continuously by the *Veda*, the *Upaniṣad*, the *Gītā*, and the hymns of saints and devotees, but it was left to Ramakrishna in modern times to demonstrate this in respect of the non-Indian religious traditions too, Christianity and Islam.<sup>2</sup> In 1926, a European student of *Vedānta* met His Holiness Śrī Śaṅkarācārya of Śṛṅgeri and at the end of the conversation wanted to know if Hinduism took converts. 'No, rather it is needless for Hinduism to take converts,' so saying, His Holiness explained why Hinduism was called

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<sup>1</sup> *The Perennial Philosophy*, p. 229.

<sup>2</sup> See 'Sri Ramakrishna: The Proof of the Validity and Vitality of Hinduism', *Vedānta Kesari*, Madras, April, 1941. For a correct estimate of Ramakrishna, the following from Schuon cannot possibly be excelled, (p. 37): 'In Ramakrishna there is something which seems to defy every category; he was like the living symbol of the inner unity of religions; he was, in fact, the first Saint deliberately wishing to penetrate "foreign" spiritual forms. . . . In the present time of confusion, disarray and doubt, he was the Saint called to "verify" forms and "reveal," if one can so express it, their single truth.'

*Sanātana Dharma*, the Eternal Law. The European said that he had no idea when he came that he would be going away from His Holiness with a desire to be a better Christian. His Holiness observed in conclusion that an artist howsoever capable required a stable background of canvas for his painting. 'Apply your God-given gifts on the stable background of your own God-chosen faith, Christianity. When the painting is over and you are contemplating the beauty of the picture, the background may fade away from your view of its own accord. . . .'

Further there is this inherent contradiction in conversion. People in different areas of the earth, brought up in different social, historical and cultural background, when they are converted, really effect a conversion in the Faith imposed on or induced in them; and while different forms of a Faith thus arise in different regions, in some cases, the strong character of an eminent convert or the well-settled nature of a converted community really alters or introduces new elements in the doctrines or practices; the result is the original uniqueness of a tradition is lost or blurred.

The service that this group of writers in the West have done is both to the East and the West. The integration they have achieved on the basis of a traditional and spiritual outlook is not exactly Oriental, for as they have shown, this outlook is common to mediaeval and scholastic West. 'What we have in mind for the Christian,' says Schuon (p. 229), 'is a return to his own sources and not an orientalisation of the West.' 'If Guénon wants the West to turn to Eastern metaphysics, it is not because they are Eastern, but because this *is* metaphysics. . . . It is only because this metaphysics still survives as a living power in Eastern societies, in so far as they have not been corrupted by the withering touch of Western, or rather *modern*, civilisation, . . . and not to orientalise the West, but to bring back the West to a consciousness

of the roots of her own life and values . . . that Guénon asks us to turn to the East.'<sup>1</sup>

The message of these writers is not less needed, nor ever more opportune than today, for the East, which under the impact of different forces from the modern West is either 'sleeping over its truths', or indulging in a 'spiritual demogogy' busy preparing versions of its teachings acceptable to the modern West, or 'committing suicide' by working itself up into a frenzy that it had been terribly mistaken down the centuries and that, cutting itself completely from its hoary moorings, it should now set itself, in the wake of the modern West, to work for the Utopia of increased production, improved standard of living and an equality instead of quality. That India and the greater part of the East are now free from Western colonialism is no guarantee that their traditions would be conserved. As Gai Eaton observes:<sup>2</sup> 'It is far too early to tell how profoundly Western ideas may have penetrated the basic structures of life in India, but it is clear that the process of penetration has by no means ceased with the abdication of the British Rāj; the country, now regarded as 'politically mature' because its traditional forms have been more or less undermined, has been left to the tender mercies of Westernised Indians who are unlikely to show such moderation as we did in tampering with the old way of life.' Both Guénon and Schuon have taken special pains to criticise modern Indian scholars or teachers who have had to 'present', so to say, the orthodox tradition of India for Western acceptance.<sup>3</sup> But one

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<sup>1</sup> Coomaraswamy, *Eastern Wisdom and Western Knowledge*.

<sup>2</sup> *The Richest Vein: Eastern Tradition and Modern Thought*, p. 17. Faber and Faber. See also *Language of the Self*, p. 198.

<sup>3</sup> To many here the criticism in this connection of Vivekananda by both Guénon and Schuon may appear somewhat excessive, but it may be pointed out that Schuon himself (p. 43), indicates the lines on which the inevitable emergence and role of Vivekananda or Gandhi might be fruitfully examined and understood.

may not consider this the chief sin of modern India when one reflects on the long history of Hindu thought, during almost the whole course of which it had been submitted to the impact of forces both internal and external, and finds that, without sacrificing its fundamentals, Hindu tradition had always put forth adaptations of forms, and that indeed it is these diversified forms which justify the claim of this culture to 'formal amplitude'. On the other hand, the real danger is from that total Westernisation in which the East is fast, thoughtlessly, throwing away its precious heritage. In their denunciation of modern Western civilisation and in the way to regeneration that they have pointed out through the recovery of the traditional spirit, it is the East that these savants have shown as supplying the key to that treasure of spiritual wisdom. To many modern Indians and their leaders who are intensely allergic to the words *Tradition* and *Orthodoxy*, this growing school of Western thinkers should act as a shock-absorber. Their re-affirmation of the value of this ancient, in fact timeless, wisdom should lead to a reawakening in the East, and to an arrest of the spreading decay of its tradition. Let not that contingency arise in which, for this ancient wisdom, as for our antique artware, we would one day have to go to the West where it has been taken and treasured by a band of *vivekins*! And for awakening us with their true and revealing exposition of this knowledge, these *vivekins* of the West are entitled to our gratitude and respect,—*ṛṣivat te'pi pūjyās syuh*, as Garga of yore said of the *śāstra-jñas* of the West.

*Śrāvaṇa Śukla Pūrṇimā*

*Veda-upākarma*

18th August 1959

V. RAGHAVAN

University of Madras

## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

WE are glad to have the opportunity and privilege of publishing a book of essays, the first to be issued in India, from the pen of Monsieur Frithjof Schuon. Our thanks are due to the author and the translators Mr. Marco Pallis and Mr. Macleod Matheson whose unstinted co-operation has made this possible. The author and translators belong to an eminent group of scholars in Europe devoted to the study and interpretation of the traditional doctrines of the East and the West for the past few decades.

We also take this opportunity to express our indebtedness to Dr. V. Raghavan, Professor of Sanskrit, University of Madras, who has taken interest in this publication from the very beginning and has contributed a valuable Foreword to it. We express our thanks also to Miss Lucy Harlow and Mrs. Ruth McMyler for preparing the Index, and to Sri M. Subramaniam, M.A., of the Vasanta Press for his keen interest and valuable help in seeing the publication through the Press.

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*Madras*

*September 1959*

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MESSRS JOHN MURRAY LTD., LONDON: Chapters I, XI.

MESSRS FABER AND FABER LTD., LONDON: Chapter II.

“CAHIERS DU SUD”, PARIS: Chapter IV.

MONSIEUR PAUL DERAINE, LYONS: Chapters VI, VII, VIII.

THE EDITOR OF “ASIA”, SAIGON: Chapters IX, X.

All the above material has been carefully revised, as well as amplified in various ways, for inclusion in the present volume, which is the first book by Frithjof Schuon to appear in India.

## LANGUAGE OF THE SELF





## CHAPTER I

### ORTHODOXY AND INTELLECTUALITY

TRADITIONAL orthodoxy means being in accord with a doctrinal or ritual form, and also, and indeed above all, with the truth which resides in all the revealed forms; thus the essence of every orthodoxy is intrinsic truth—it is one of Guénon's great merits to have shown this—and not merely the internal logic of a doctrine that may ultimately turn out to be false. What makes the definition of orthodoxy rather troublesome is that it presents two principal modes, the one essential or intrinsic, and the other formal or extrinsic: the latter is the being in accord with a revealed form, and the former the being in accord with the essential and universal truth, with or without being in accord with any particular form, so that the two modes can sometimes stand opposed externally. To give an example, it can be said that Buddhism is extrinsically heterodox in relation to Hinduism, because it marks a departure from the basic forms of the latter, and at the same time intrinsically orthodox, because it is in accord with that universal truth from which both traditions proceed; on the other hand the Brahmo-Samāj, like every other variety of "progressive" Neo-Hinduism, is doubly heterodox, first in relation to Hinduism itself, and secondly in relation to truth unqualified; heterodox, therefore, both from the particular point of view of the form and from the universal point of view of the essence. A *sannyāsi* may completely ignore considerations of caste without thereby separating himself from Brāhmanical

orthodoxy, because the latter is able to find a place for all kinds of spiritual possibilities; but if he preaches the abolition of the Hindu social system he becomes a heretic, because in that case he attacks Revelation, which is the form "willed by God", or rather, "one of the forms", since none is exclusive. It is true that "the exception proves the rule", that is, that the unlimited nature of All-Possibility provides for exceptions, and these consequently can occur also within the domain of orthodoxy, as in the case of a man like Kabir, for example; but it is just here that an apparent heresy is seen to occupy the formal plane only, without the intrusion of any idea or attitude that is intrinsically false.<sup>1</sup>

Some people will no doubt object that Hindu spirituality knows nothing of orthodoxy, since "opinions" and "systems" contradict one another in Hinduism even more than in any other traditional wisdom; the claim is often made, sometimes rightly, sometimes wrongly, that "the great Hindu thinkers" are beyond forms, and that, because of this, they are free from all "narrow dogmatism".<sup>2</sup> In reality, if Hindu orthodoxy is sometimes more difficult to grasp, from outside, than the so-called monotheistic orthodoxies, this is because it is based more directly on metaphysical essence, with the result that the form can be treated more freely; moreover dogma, or what corresponds to it, assumes a greater variety of forms there than in the Western religions, which shows, not that Hinduism is

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<sup>1</sup> Kabir is the incarnation, not of a form or a theory, but of an essence or a realization; he is the exceptional but necessary manifestation of the extra-formal link between Hindu *bhakti* and Islāmic *mahabbah*; an example like this could not help appearing in India, which was Brāhmanical and Muslim at the same time. In other words, Kabir's *bhakti* is exceptional because it is without any formal framework, and yet necessary because dictated by the spiritual circumstances and also, above all, by the unlimited nature of Divine Possibility.

<sup>2</sup> In this context the term "thinkers" (a commonly used but highly misleading one) has been introduced advisedly, as covering all manner of Hindu exponents—Westernised heretics as well as the most venerable authorities of the Vedic tradition.

disregardful of orthodoxy, but that its orthodoxy enjoys a wider scope from the point of view of form, which alone is in question here. The formal amplitude of Hinduism may prove a stumbling-block to some intelligences, but it cannot be taken to mean that Hinduism sanctions error, as in practice happens with modern philosophy where "genius" and "culture" count for as much as or for more than truth, the very existence of which is questioned by some; the formal "fluidity" peculiar to Hinduism in no way prevents error from being always recognisable there, just the same as anywhere else, either with the help of scriptural criteria, or by the light of metaphysical truth, which always immediately unmasks its absurdity, even when the heterodoxy is based on a sacred text, naturally through distorting its meaning. The doctrines of *jñāna* and *bhakti* contradict each other externally on account of differences of level and mode, but neither of them is absurd in itself; to say that the world is real, or that it is unreal, or that it is both at the same time, or that it is neither, may be true in each case according to a particular perspective, and these perspectives do not derive from arbitrary human speculation, but from the nature of things; intrinsic heterodoxy, we repeat, is contrary not only to this or that particular perspective or formulation, but to the very nature of things, because it is the result, not of a perspective which is legitimate by nature and therefore "providential", but of the arbitrary fiat of a mental faculty closed to what is above and relying only on its own resources; the mind then finds itself obliged to "create" what the Intellect, being either radically or else "accidentally" paralysed is unable to transmit to it.<sup>1</sup> When one wishes to escape, from "dogmatic narrowness", it is important to do so "from above" and not "from below": one transcends a dogmatic

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<sup>1</sup> Hinduism despite its extreme conceptual "elasticity" does not "swallow" everything, otherwise Jainism and Buddhism would have become "*darśanas*" side by side with the others, instead of finding themselves excluded from Hindu orthodoxy.

form by attaining a profounder grasp of it and by contemplating its universal content, and not by denying it in the name of a pretentious and iconoclastic "ideal of pure truth".

One must take into account, also, the differentiated character of the manifestation of the "total doctrine". When a *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad says for instance that "the divergences of the theologians are a blessing", this means that the "total doctrine", which is contained synthetically in Revelation, is only rendered explicit by "fragments" which are outwardly divergent yet fundamentally united. The "totality" which we are discussing here is not total in relation to intrinsic truth—and it is therefore not qualitative—but only in relation to human possibilities of understanding and realization. For example, it goes without saying that from the point of view of quality the perspective of Śaṅkara is "total", and that, because of this, it contains Rāmānuja's perspective eminently, since it reaches beyond it; but it cannot take all possible levels of truth into account in its formulation, so that Rāmānuja's perspective in its turn becomes necessary. Let us observe, in this connection, that an intellectual authority is infallible within the limits assigned to it by the tradition, perspective or inspiration from which it derives, and on that plane alone. It certainly can be infallible beyond these limits and on all planes, but it is not necessarily so, first of all because no man can possess *a priori* knowledge of all the elements of truth, and secondly because intellectual intuition can in certain circumstances express itself more easily in one dimension than in another, according to the nature of the intellectual receptacle.

When we say that a doctrine is "providential", we mean that it is contained in its own way in the Revelation itself, and that it cannot avoid "crystallizing out" at the cyclic moment assigned to it by its own nature. Thus *bhakti* always existed as a spiritual possibility, but for its flowering it

nevertheless needed certain conditions, corresponding to a particular phase of the Hindu cycle. Every cycle has its qualitative aspects: what is possible at one moment is not possible at another, so that the emergence of a given perspective does not occur at all moments indifferently; this provides us with yet another criterion of orthodoxy—or heterodoxy for that matter—because it is certain that “in our age”, that is to say already since the past few centuries, the “cyclic moment” for the manifestation of the great perspectives (*darśanas*) has been outlived; re-adaptations, in the sense of legitimate and therefore adequate and effective syntheses, remain always possible, but not the manifestation of fundamental perspectives which are “new” from the point of view of their form. The least one can say is that no modern formulation can “go beyond” the ancient ones; one can comment on the ancient perspectives, treat them from a particular point of view or express them according to a particular inspiration, but not contradict or replace them. A Rāmānuja could contradict a Śaṅkarācārya from the standpoint of a perspective which was admittedly more limited but which yet was legitimate at its own level and “willed by God”; but a man of our age is not a Rāmānuja, that is to say, he cannot reject Śaṅkara except by following in Rāmānuja’s footsteps and by remaining within his doctrinal limits, that is to say, on the plane of traditional *bhakti*; he cannot “go beyond” Śaṅkara’s *jñāna* and Rāmānuja’s *bhakti* at the same time, claiming the right to classify them and to add withal a new and better element. The falsity of such attempts always betrays itself—apart from the intrinsic error—in the tendency to belittlement and falsification so characteristic of the modern world; and in fact it requires a prodigious lack of spiritual perception and sense of proportion to take any contemporary thinking, even the best possible, for one of the great “crystallizations” of wisdom.

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The question of the limitations in Rāmānuja's outlook, or in *bhakti* generally, obliges us to point out that in order to avoid certain altogether unjustifiable confusions one must distinguish between two eminently unequal degrees of doctrinal restriction: in the first case, the doctrine accepts certain limitations in view of particular mental conditions or of such and such a spiritual method; in the second, it is intrinsically false: this is the whole difference between "lesser truth" and error. The first limitation is to some extent dictated by the needs of a particular mentality, in which sense it is "willed by God", as in the case of men like Rāmānuja or Aristotle, to cite two very different examples <sup>1</sup>, whereas the second limitation springs from human weakness, and also from the devil who by the very nature of things will exploit this weakness. In other words, two doctrines may be opposed either through a legitimate difference of perspective <sup>2</sup> or else because one of them is erroneous, or else because both are erroneous but in different ways; one must therefore carefully avoid putting formal discrepancies and fundamental contradictions on the same level.

<sup>1</sup> We are speaking here of doctrine, not of "personal" merit. Our knowledge of the particular nature of the philosophic point of view inclines us to think that there is no justification for attributing to the Stagirite the spiritual stature of a man like Rāmānuja, although, from another point of view, a mind which dominated a millennium of Greek thought must have been of an intrinsic quality far out of the ordinary. As for St. Thomas Aquinas, his metaphysical knowledge, as such, must have contributed to his sainthood, yet he was not a saint in virtue of his philosophy, a fact which he himself expressed by describing his work as "straw": *Omnia quae scripsi videntur mihi paleae*.

<sup>2</sup> When Averroes admits the unity of the intellect and denies the immortality of the individual soul he seems to be right in the sense that the one and universal Intellect exists, particular intelligences being lighted only through it, and also in the sense that the purely psychic portion of the soul is in fact perishable; but his opponents are also right, in the sense that the diversification of the intelligence and the immortality of the human person are incontestable realities. The specifically philosophical or logical point of view—setting aside all considerations of spiritual opportunity—is characterized by its incapacity to reconcile paradoxical truths, an incapacity which stems from the very nature of reason.

The following point cannot be sufficiently stressed: philosophy, in the sense in which we understand the term (which is also its current meaning) primarily consists of logic; this definition of Guénon's puts philosophic thought in its right place and clearly distinguishes it from "intellectual intuition", which is the direct apprehension of truth. It is important, however, to establish yet another distinction on the rational plane itself. Logic can either operate as part of an intellection, or else, on the contrary, put itself at the service of an error; moreover unintelligence can diminish or even nullify logic, so that philosophy can in fact become the vehicle of almost anything: it can be an Aristotelianism carrying ontological insights, just as it can degenerate into an "existentialism" in which logic has become a mere shadow of itself, a blind and unreal operation; indeed, what can be said of a "metaphysic" which idiotically posits man at the centre of the Real, like a sack of coal, and which operates with such blatantly subjective and conjectural concepts as "worry" and "anguish"? When unintelligence—and the variety we mean here is in no wise incompatible with what passes for intelligence in "worldly" circles—and passion prostitute logic, it is impossible to escape from that mental satanism which is so frequently to be found in contemporary thought.

The validity of a logical demonstration thus depends on the knowledge which we, as demonstrators, have of the subject in view, and it is evidently wrong to take as our starting-point not this direct knowledge but pure and simple logic. When man has no "visionary" knowledge of Being, and merely "thinks" with his "brain" instead of "seeing" with his "heart", all his logic is useless to him, because it starts out from an initial fallacy. Moreover, the validity of a demonstration must be distinguished from its dialectical efficacy; the latter evidently depends on the intuitive disposition available for the recognition of truth when demonstrated, and therefore



on an intellectual capacity. Logic is nothing but the science of mental co-ordination and of arriving at rational conclusions; it cannot, therefore, attain the transcendent through its own resources; a supralogical—not an illogical—dialectic, based on symbolism and analogy, and therefore descriptive rather than ratiocinative, may be harder for some people to assimilate, but it conforms more closely to transcendent Reality. Contemporary philosophy, on the other hand, really amounts to a decapitated logic: what is intellectually evident it calls “prejudice”; wishing to free itself from servitude to the *mental*, it sinks into infra-logic; shutting itself off from the intellectual light above, it exposes itself to the obscurity of the lowest “subconscious” beneath.<sup>1</sup> Philosophic scepticism takes itself for a healthy attitude and for an absence of “prejudices”, whereas it is in fact something completely artificial; it proceeds, not from real knowledge, but from sheer ignorance, and for this reason it is as alien to intelligence as it is to reality.

The fact that the philosophic type of thought is centred on logic and not directly on intuition implies that the latter is left at the mercy of the needs of the former: in the Scholastic

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<sup>1</sup> This is what Kant, with his rationalistic simplifications, did not foresee. According to him, every cognition which is not rational in the narrowest sense is only affectation and high-flown sentiment (*Schwärmerei*); now if anything is an affectation, it is this very opinion. It is not on the side of the Scholastics that arbitrariness, phantasy and irrationality are to be found, but wholly on the side of the rationalists, who fling themselves with ridiculous and often pathetic arguments against everything they do not understand. With Voltaire, Rousseau and Kant bourgeois unintelligence (*vaiśya* unintelligence as the Hindus would say) erects itself into a “doctrine” and becomes definitely entrenched in European “thought”, giving birth, through the French Revolution, to positivist science, industry and quantitative “culture”. Henceforward the mental hypertrophy of the “cultured” man ekes out the absence of intellectual penetration; all feeling for the Absolute and for principles is drowned in a commonplace empiricism, on to which is grafted a pseudo-mysticism with “positivistic” or “humanistic” tendencies. Perhaps some people will reproach us with lack of reticence, but we would like to ask where is the reticence of the philosophers who shamelessly slash at the wisdom of countless centuries.

disputations of medieval Europe, it was sometimes less a question of truth than of a certain opportunism in the field of logic, the point being to steer clear of certain dangerous conclusions. Christian Scholasticism, it must not be forgotten, was above all a rampart against error; it aimed at being an apologetic, and not an auxiliary to meditation or contemplation as is the case with the doctrines of "operative" metaphysic—of gnosis or *jñāna*. Prior to Scholasticism, Greek philosophy, for its part, aimed at satisfying a certain logical need to determine causes rather than at furnishing intelligence with a means to realization: moreover, the fact that truth possesses the quality of disinterestedness leads easily, on the plane of speculative logic, to a tendency to pursue "art for art's sake" and hence to fall into that "windy loquacity of the philosophers" stigmatized by St. Bernard.

The Intellect is a receptive faculty and not a productive power: it does not "create", it receives and transmits: it is a mirror that reflects reality adequately and therefore effectively. In the case of most men in the "Iron Age" the intellect is atrophied to the point of being reduced to a mere virtuality, though admittedly it is not separated from the mental faculty by any water-tight partition; even so, from the point of view which interests us here, the respective operations of the Intellect and the mind are seen to be radically different (though there are also necessarily some analogies between them) and this difference exists in spite of certain appearances to the contrary, due to the fact that every man is a thinking being, whether he be a sage or an ignoramus. The mind is analogous to the Intellect in so far as it is a species of intelligence, but it is opposed to it on account of its limited, indirect and discursive nature; the apparent limitations of the Intellect are quite accidental and extrinsic, while the limitations of the mental faculty are inherent in it. The Intellect, though it cannot externalize the "total truth" because that is in

the nature of things impossible, can perfectly well establish adequate and sufficient landmarks, rather in the way that one represents space by a circle, a cross, a square, a spiral or a point. One must not confuse "truth" and "reality"; the latter refers to "being", the former to "knowing", to the image of reality reflected in the intellectual mirror. To say that the Intellect is not capable of comprehending total truth—when this capacity is its sufficient reason and at the same time the characteristic which distinguishes it from the rational faculty—is to confuse truth, which is the equation between "being" and "knowing", with reality, which is the Suchness of things. It is true that reality is often referred to by the word "truth", but that is a dialectical synthesis which aims at defining truth from the point of view of its virtuality of "being", of "reality". If one thus includes ontological reality, Suchness, and therefore also the "personal" realization of God, in one's conception of truth, there is no such thing as "total truth" on the plane of thought: but if by "truth" one understands thought conceived as an adequate reflection of "being" on the intellectual plane, then a "total truth" is indeed to be found on this plane, but only on condition, first of seeing nothing "quantitative" in this totality, and secondly of clearly specifying that this "totality" can also be given a relative sense, according to the order of thought to which it belongs. There is a total truth which is such because it includes, in principle, all possible truths; such is the metaphysical doctrine, whether its enunciation be simple or complex, symbolic or dialectical; but there is also a truth which is total on the plane of spiritual realization, and in this case "truth" becomes a synonym of "reality". Just as on the plane of facts there is never anything absolute—or, more precisely, nothing absolutely absolute, a very important distinction in its way—so "totality", while being perfect and sufficient in practice, always remains relative in theory: it can assume the form of an

elaborate doctrine, but also that of a simple sentence, just as spatial totality can be expressed by a complex system of interweavings which the eye cannot unravel, but also by an elementary sign, such as a cross or a point.

In the same order of ideas, we should like to add the following: if it be useless to try and establish a "system" including every possible aspect of Truth or Reality, it is nevertheless quite legitimate to develop a traditional perspective to the point of drawing from it all the consequences which human experience can require, and this development is in principle unlimited. If there cannot be an exhaustive system embracing the real, embracing, for example, the intelligible nature of the world, the reason is that there cannot be a total correspondence between reality and its reflection in logic, as otherwise there would be nothing to distinguish the two; nevertheless, when one knows the metaphysical foundation from which any particular "system" proceeds, this system can supply every necessary key to that reality with which it is concerned.

In so far as being a system is a perfection, God is systematic—He is a "geometer"—and so also is truth; but in so far as a system is a limitation, truth escapes all systematization. In practice, this means that every traditional doctrine is a system from one point of view, and is indeterminate from another; the latter aspect shows itself in the variety of orthodox perspectives, and therefore also in the plurality of systems, the last feature, moreover, sometimes appearing in one and the same author, at least where one has to do with an esotericism.

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We have compared intelligence to a mirror; in this connection it must be remembered that there is always a certain relation of inversion between subject and object, that is to say, the subject, which reflects, inverts the object, which is reflected. A tree reflected in the water is inverted and therefore is "false" in respect to the real tree; but it always remains a

tree, and even "this tree", and it never is anything else; consequently the reflected tree is perfectly "true", despite its illusory quality, so that it is erroneous to conclude that intellection is illusory on account of its subjective framework. The powers of the cosmic illusion are not unlimited, because the Absolute is reflected in the contingent, otherwise the latter would not exist; everything is in God—"All is *Ātman*"—and the Absolute breaks out everywhere, it is "infinitely near"; the partitions are illusory, they are immeasurably great and infinitesimally small at the same time. The world is paradoxical by definition, which is a way of saying that it is not God; every image is at once true and false, and the most one can do is to discriminate between various levels. The *Avatāra* is "true God and true man", which is the very formula of the paradoxicality and parallelism which rule the cosmos; paradoxicality because the creature is not the Creator, and parallelism because nothing can be found "outside God", for Reality is one.

It is futile to try to exploit, in favour of heterodoxy and therefore of freedom for error, scriptural passages such as the following: "The Vedas contain differences. . . . There is no sage whose thought does not contain differences. . . .". Such texts, far from intending to proclaim a more or less agnostic relativism, simply set forth the element of limitation, exclusion and contradiction implied in every affirmation. "Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God", said Christ; which means that every manifestation, even when divine, implies imperfection; it implies it because it is a manifestation, and not on account of its content, for this can be divine and therefore "absolute". If a Taoist master has said that "one never transmits anything but error", this is because there is a relation of inversion between the "idea" and the "reality", the "thought" and the "lived", the "conceived" and the "realized", which is an application of the principle

which the Sūfis call "*barzakh*" (isthmus): seen from above, the form is obscurity, but seen from below it is light; this inversion, however, is not everything, for there is also the direct analogy, the essential identity, without which there could be no tradition to serve as a formal framework for the experience of the sages; though one may bring out the "earthly" or "human" aspect of the tradition, inevitable at its own level, this certainly does not mean that other and deeper aspects of tradition are thereby done away with.

In a certain sense, therefore, the doctrine is identical with truth, for one must always take into account the "relatively absolute"; the doctrine ought to have more than a relative value for us, seeing that its content extends beyond all relativity. No difficulty arises from the fact that pure intelligence—the Intellect—goes far beyond thought and that there is no continuity, despite their identity of essence, between a concept as such and truth, the Suchness of the real; to bemoan the deficiencies of thought is to expect it to be other than itself; it is the classical error of the philosophers, who wish to include everything in thought. From the point of view of concrete, not abstract, knowledge, the problem of truth is solved in the very nature of Intellect.

Intellectual intuition cannot be created where its absence characterises the essence of an individual, but it can be actualized where its absence is merely accidental, otherwise it would be useless to talk about it. Knowledge, as St. Augustine insists along with Plato and many others, is not something to be added from without; teaching is only the occasional cause of the apprehension of a truth already latent within us. Teaching is reminding; knowing is reminiscence. In the Intellect, the subject is the object, "being", and the object is the subject "knowing"; hence there is absolute certitude.

There are some things which exceed the possibilities of reason; there are none which exceed the possibilities of

intelligence as such. If man did not contain an absolute element—he is “made in the image of God”—he would only be an animal like the rest; but man knows the animals, while they do not know man. Man alone can step out of the cosmos, and this possibility proves—and presupposes—that he is in some sense an incarnation of the Absolute.

## CHAPTER II

### THE VEDĀNTA

THE VEDĀNTA appears among explicit doctrines as one of the most direct formulations possible of what makes the very essence of our spiritual reality. This directness is counter-balanced by its requirement of renunciation, or, more precisely, of total detachment (*vairāgya*).

The Vedāntic perspective finds its equivalents in all the great religions which regulate humanity, for truth is one. Some formulations may, however, be dependent on dogmatic perspectives which restrict their immediate intelligibility or make direct expressions of them relatively difficult of access. In fact, whereas Hinduism is, as it were, made up of self-contained fractions (*e.g.* the two *Mīmāṃsas*, the *Sāṅkhya*, and so forth), the monotheistic religions are single organisms in which the various parts are so closely bound up with the whole that the selfsame formal elements have to serve all purposes alike, whether these be individual or collective, profoundly intellectual or quite exoteric.

If Hinduism is organically linked with the Upaniṣads, it is not, however, simply reducible to the Śaivaite Vedāntism of Śaṅkara, although the latter must be considered as expressing the essence of the Vedānta and so also of the Hindu tradition itself.

The Vedānta of Śaṅkara, which is here more particularly being considered, is divine and immemorial in its origin and by no means the creation of Śaṅkara, who was only its great



and providential enunciator. This Vedānta has above all in view the virtues of the mind, those which converge towards perfect and permanent concentration, whereas moralities—whether Hindu or Monotheist—extend these same principles to the domain of action, which is almost suppressed in the case of the wandering monk, the *sannyāsi*. Thus calm of the spirit (*śama*) becomes, in the case of the Moslem for example, contentment (*ridha*) or confidence in God (*tawakkul*), which in fact produces calm of the spirit. The Vedānta retains the alchemical essence of the virtues.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Vedānta the contemplative must become absolutely 'Himself'; according to other perspectives, such as that of the Semitic religions, man must become absolutely 'Other' than himself—or than the 'I'—and from the point of view of pure truth this comes to exactly the same thing.

In Sūfism the term *Hua*, 'He', in no way signifies that the divine Aseity is conceived in an objectivized mode but solely that it is beyond the distinction between subject and object which is itself designated by the terms *ana* and *enta*, 'I—thou'.

The 'Divine Subject' illuminates the plane of cosmic objectivation by descent into it through the mystery of the 'Spirit', *Er-Ruh*, and 'sustains'—and also 'absorbs'—this plane by virtue of the mystery of the 'Light', *En-Nur*.

In the Vedānta the demiurgic tendency is conceived as an objectivation, while in Sūfism it is conceived as an individuation, and so in fact as a subjectivation, God being then, not pure 'Subject' as in the Hindu perspective, but pure 'Object', 'He' (*Hua*), That which no subjective vision limits. This divergence lies only in the form, for it goes without saying

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<sup>1</sup> This is what the Sūfi Ibn El-Arif also does when he seems to reject, one after another, the religious virtues. In reality he detaches them both from the interested ego and from the anthropomorphic aspect of the Divinity, in order to keep only their essences. Note that Hinduism also knows contentment (*santoṣa*) and confidence in God (*prapatti*), but the *sannyāsi* goes beyond these.

that the 'Subject' of the Vedānta is anything but an individual determination and that the Sūfic 'Object' is anything but the effect of an 'ignorance'. The 'Self' (*Ātmā*) is 'He', for it is 'purely objective' inasmuch as it excludes all individuation and the 'He' (*Hua*) is 'Self' and so 'purely subjective' in the sense that it excludes all objectivation.

The Sūfic formula *La ana wa la Anta : Hua* (Neither I nor Thou but He) is thus equivalent to the formula of the Upaniṣads *Tat tvam asi* (That art thou).

When the Vedāntist speaks of the 'unicity of the Subject' (or, more precisely, 'non-duality', *advaita*), a Sūfi would speak of the 'unicity of Existence' (that is, of 'Reality', *wahdat el-Wujud*). In Hindu terms the difference is that the Vedāntist stresses the aspect of 'Consciousness' (*Cit*) and the Sūfi the aspect of 'Being' (*Sat*).<sup>1</sup>

That which in man goes beyond individuality and all separateness is not only pure 'Consciousness' but also pure 'Existence'. Ascesis purifies the existential side of man and thus also indirectly purifies the intellectual side.

If man could be limited to 'being' he would be holy by that very fact.

*Ātmā* is pure Light and Bliss, pure 'Consciousness', pure 'Subject'.<sup>2</sup> There is nothing that is not related to this Reality;

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<sup>1</sup> At least in the school of *Wujudiyyah* (from *Wujud*, 'Existence', *Wujud mutlaq* being 'Absolute Existence', God) though not in that of *Shuhudiyyah* (from *Shuhud*, 'direct vision', the word *Shahid* meaning 'Witness' exactly like the Sanskrit word *Sākṣin*) the perspective of which is closely analogous to that of the Vedānta. Both these perspectives necessarily have a Qurānic foundation, but the former is doubtless more in conformity with the most apparent meaning of the Book. The latter school has been falsely accused of immanentism because of its thesis of the 'One Witness' and of indefinitely diversified 'mirrors'.

<sup>2</sup> The notion of 'the subject', far from being only psychological, is before all else logical and principial and so cannot be restricted to any particular order; the obvious subjectivity of the faculties of sensation already proves that the pair 'subject-object' does not belong solely to the realm of psychology. All the more is it true that metaphysical notions such as the 'Witness' (*Sākṣin*) in the Vedānta or, in Sūfism, the

even the 'object' which is least in conformity with It still is It, but 'objectivized' by *Māyā*, the power of illusion consequent on the infinity of the Self.

This is the very definition of universal objectivation. But within it one must distinguish between two fundamental modes, the one 'Subjective' and the other 'Objective'. The first mode is this: between the object as such and the pure and infinite Subject there stands in some sort the objectivized Subject, that is to say the cognitive act through which, by analysis and synthesis, the bare object is brought back to the Subject. This function of objectivizing (in relation to the Subject, which then, as it were, projects itself upon the objective plane), or of subjectivizing (in relation to the object which is integrated in the subjective and so brought back to the divine Subject), is the spirit which knows and discerns, the manifested intelligence, consciousness, which is relative and so can be an object of knowledge.

The other fundamental mode of objectivation may be described thus: in order to realize the Subject, which is *Sat* (Being), *Cit* (Knowledge or Consciousness) and *Ānanda* (Bliss), it is needful to know that objects are superimposed upon the Subject and to concentrate one's mind on the Subject alone. Between the objective world, which then becomes identified with 'ignorance' (*avidya*) and the Subject, the Self (*Ātmā*), there is interposed an objectivation of the Subject. This objectivation is direct and central; it is revelation, truth, grace and therefore it is also the *avatāra*, the *guru*, the doctrine, the method, the *mantra*.

Thus the sacred formula, *mantra*, symbolizes and incarnates the Subject by objectivizing It; by 'covering' the objective world, this dark cavern of ignorance, or rather by

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'Knower' (*El-Aqil*, with its complement *El-Ma'qul*, the 'Known'), or again the 'Divine Subjectivity' (*Anniyah*, with its complement *Huwiyyah*, the 'Divine Objectivity') have nothing whatever to do with psychology.

‘substituting’ itself for it, the *mantra* leads the spirit lost in the labyrinth of objectivation back to the pure Subject.

That is why in the most diverse traditions *mantra* and its practice, *japa*, are referred to as ‘recollection’ (the *dhikr* of Sūfism): with the aid of the symbol, of the divine name, the spirit which has gone astray and become separated ‘recollects’ that it is pure ‘Consciousness’, pure ‘Subject’, pure ‘Self’.

The ‘non-difference’ of real and unreal does not in any way imply either the unreality of the Self or the reality of the world. To start with, the real is not ‘non-different’ in function of the unreal; it is the unreal which is ‘non-different’ in function of the real, not, that is to say, inasmuch as it is unreality, but inasmuch as it is a ‘lesser reality’, the latter being none the less ‘extrinsically unreal’ in relation to Absolute reality.

*Māyā*, illusion, or the ‘divine art’<sup>1</sup> which expresses *Ātmā* according to indefinitely varied modes and of which *avidyā*, the ignorance which conceals *Ātmā*, is the purely negative aspect, proceeds mysteriously from *Ātmā* Itself, in the sense that *Māyā* is a necessary consequence of *Ātmā*’s infinity. This is what Śaṅkarācārya expresses by saying that *Māyā* is without beginning.

*Ātmā* is beyond the opposition of subject-object; one can, however, speak of It as pure ‘Subject’ when one starts from the consideration of ‘objects’, which are so many ‘superimpositions’ in relation to *Ātmā*.

*Māyā* is the objectivizing (or manifesting) tendency. The principal degrees of objectivation (or manifestation) are the ‘feet’ (*pādas*) of *Ātmā*, or, considered from the standpoint of microcosmic interconnection, they are its envelopes (*kośas*). Each degree of objectivation is equivalent to a more or less indirect image of *Ātmā*, an image reflected inversely: at the same time each degree realizes an inversion in relation to the one superior to it and by which it is contained, because the

<sup>1</sup> Ananda K. Coomaraswamy suggested the word ‘art’ as a translation of *Māyā* to show its positive function.

relationship of Subject-objectivation (or Principle-manifestation) is repeated from one *pāda* or *kośa* to another; thus the psychic or subtle objectivation is principial in relation to the corporeal or gross objectivation, and likewise the formless objectivation is principial in relation to the formal objectivation, which for its part contains precisely the psychic and corporeal planes. However, the universal and fundamental inversion as between Subject and objectivation is never done away with as a result of the inversions included within the objectivation itself, for these are never produced under the same relationship and never under any relationship capable of nullifying that first inversion. Inversion *within* an inversion is therefore never inversion *of* the inversion, never, that is to say, a re-establishment of the 'normal' relationship. In other words the subordinate inversion which, within the great inversion that the Cosmos represents in relation to the Self, appears as if it ought to nullify the latter—since it inverts it symbolically—is in its turn inverse in relation to the divine Norm. An opaque body does not become transparent when painted white to compensate for its opacity, although the colour white represents light or transparency, and for that reason also represents the negation of the character of opacity. Or again, the fact that a body is black adds nothing to its opaque character.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, if the formal manifestation—both subtle and gross—is inverse in relation to formless manifestation, this nevertheless does not cancel the inversion

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<sup>1</sup> When Sūfism teaches that the trees of Paradise have their roots above, it would be wrong to try to grasp this idea by means of the imagination, for the relationship in question, when once translated into terrestrial forms, precisely is expressed by the terrestrial position of trees. In other words, if one were to behold the trees of paradise, a spirit endowed with the appropriate faculty of vision would accept them as being 'normal' exactly in the same way as the mind accepts the trees on this earth. In this order of ideas it is instructive to note the fact that the retina of the eye receives only inverted images and that it is the mind which re-establishes the normal and objective relationship.

realized by formless manifestation in relation to non-manifestation—or non-objectivation—which is the Self, the Subject.

It is quite easy to label as 'vague' or 'contradictory' something one cannot understand. Rationalist thinkers generally refuse to admit a truth that represents contradictory aspects and that is situated, seemingly beyond grasping, midway between two extrinsic and negative enunciations. Now there are some realities which could be formulated in no other way than this. The ray which proceeds from a light is itself light, since it illumines, but it is not the light from which it proceeded; therefore it is neither that light nor yet other than that light; in point of fact it is nothing else but light, though growing ever weaker in proportion to its distance from its source. A faint glow is light for the darkness it illumines but darkness for the light whence it emanates. Similarly *Māyā* is both light and darkness at the same time: she is light<sup>1</sup> inasmuch as, being the 'divine art', she reveals the secrets of *Ātmā*; she is darkness inasmuch as she conceals *Ātmā*. As darkness she is 'ignorance', *avidya*.<sup>2</sup>

In spiritual realization the Symbol lays hold on the cosmic tendency of objectivation: in the natural course of its drawing away from *Ātmā* the soul meets the objectivation of the pure 'Subject', in this case not indirect but direct; the indirect objectivation is the world with its endless diversity, and the direct objectivation is the Symbol, which replaces the pure 'Subject' on the objectivized plane. *Ātmā* occupies the centre of man as 'Subject', pure and infinite, and It surrounds man

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<sup>1</sup> *Māyā*, by the very fact that she is the 'divine art' inherent in the Principle, is also identified with Wisdom (Sophia) understood in precisely the same sense as is given to it in the Judaeo-Christian tradition; as such she is the mother of the *Avatāra* (René Guénon: *Māyā*, in *Études Traditionnelles*, July-August 1947). This is what Islamic esotericism designates by the terms 'Science' (*Ilm*) and 'Light' (*Nur*).

<sup>2</sup> To this 'ignorance' there corresponds, in Islamic terminology, 'association' (*shirk*), that is to say the fact of associating a 'superimposition' with Unity.

as the indefinitely differentiated objectivation of the 'Subject'. The *yogi* or *mukta*, the 'delivered one', perceives *Ātmā* in everything, but the man who is undelivered has to superimpose on the world the synthetic and direct image of *Ātmā* in order to eliminate the superimposition in relation to *Ātmā* which the world itself represents. A symbol is anything that serves as a direct support for spiritual realization, as, for example a *mantra* or a divine name, or, in a secondary way, a graphic, pictorial or sculptured symbol such as a sacred image.

The revelation of Sinai, the Messianic redemption, the descent of the Quran—these are so many examples of a 'Subjectivizing objectivation' effected by the symbol, in which *Ātmā* is 'incarnated' in *Māyā* and *Māyā* expresses *Ātmā*.

To say, as do the Vedāntists, that *Māyā* is an attribute of *Īśvara* and that *Māyā* expresses *Īśvara* and at the same time veils Him, indeed signifies that the world derives from the infinity of *Ātmā*. One could also say that the world is a consequence of the absolute necessity of Being.

If *Māyā* is presented as a postulate, this must not be taken in a philosophical or psychological sense as if it were a question of an 'hypothesis', for this postulate is necessary and consequently corresponds to an objective reality. *Māyā*, taken as the purely negative factor of objectivation, could not possibly be known positively; she therefore imprints herself on the intelligence as an 'unextended' and 'ungraspable' element.

In a certain sense *Māyā* represents the possibility for Being of not being. The All-Possibility must by definition and on pain of contradiction include its own impossibility.

It is in order not to be, that Being incarnates in the multitude of souls; it is in order not to be, that the ocean squanders itself in myriads of flecks of foam.

If the soul obtains deliverance, that is because Being is.

Nothing is external to absolute Reality; the world is therefore a kind of internal dimension of *Brahman*. But *Brahman* is

without relativity; thus the world is a necessary aspect of the absolute necessity of *Brahman*. Put in another way, relativity is an aspect of the Absolute.

Relativity, *Māyā*, is the *Śakti* of the Absolute, *Brahman*.

If the existence of the relative were excluded from possibility, the Absolute would not be the Absolute.

The essence of the world, which is diversity, is *Brahman*. It might be objected that *Brahman* cannot be the essence of a diversity seeing that It is non-duality. To be sure, *Brahman* is not the essence of the world, for, from the standpoint of the Absolute, the world is not; but one can say that the world, in so far as it exists, has *Brahman* for its essence; failing this it would possess no reality whatsoever. Diversity, for its part, is but the inverse reflection of the Infinity, or of the All-Possibility, of *Brahman*.

The things of nature are the indirect objectivations of the Self; the supernatural is Its direct and flashing objectivation.

The Cosmos is the total objectivation, 'made in the image of God', which includes all other cosmic objectivations.

The cosmic objectivation of the Self presupposes the divine Objectivation, Being, *Īśvara*, or *Apara-Brahman*. Sūfism expresses it by this formula, 'I was a hidden treasure and I wished to be known'.

'Union' (*yoga*): the Subject (*Ātmā*) becomes object (the *Veda*, *Dharma*), in order that the object (the objectivized subject, man) may be able to become the (absolute) Subject.

'Deification'<sup>1</sup>: God became man in order that man might be able to become God. 'Man' pre-exists in God—this is the 'Son'—and 'God' pre-exists in man—this is the Intellect. The point of contact between God and man is, objectively, Christ and, subjectively, it is the purified heart, 'intelligence-love'.

'Unification' (*tawhid*): the One (*illa-Llah*) has become 'nought' (*la ilaha*), in order that 'nought' might be able to

<sup>1</sup> This term is used by certain Christian Fathers.



become the One; the One has become separate and multiple (the Quran) in order that the separate and multiple (the soul) might be able to become the One. The 'multiple' pre-exists in the One—this is the uncreated Quran, the eternal Word—and the 'One' pre-exists in the multiple: this is the heart-intellect, and in the macrocosm it is the universal Spirit.

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The conceptions of Rāmānuja are contained in those of Śaṅkara and are transcended by them. When Śaṅkara sees in the localization and duration of sensory objects a direct and tangible manifestation of their unreality, he does not say, as Rāmānuja seems to have believed, that they do not exist *qua* objects, but he says that *qua* existing objects they are unreal. Rāmānuja affirms against Śaṅkarācārya truths which the latter never denied on their own level. Rāmānuja shows a tendency to make everything 'concrete' in function of the created world, and this indeed agrees both with the Vaiṣṇavite point of view and also with the spirit of the West which is allied to the same perspective.

The antagonism between Śaṅkara and Nāgārjuna is of the same order as that which opposes Rāmānuja to Śaṅkara, with this difference, however, that, if Śaṅkara rejects the doctrine of Nāgārjuna, it is because the form of the latter corresponds—independently of its real content and of the spiritual virtuality it represents—to a more restricted perspective than that of the Vedānta;<sup>1</sup> when, on the other hand, Rāmānuja rejects the

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<sup>1</sup> Buddhism in general, and with it Nāgārjuna, takes for its starting point a fact of worldly existence, that of suffering; whereas Śaṅkara, with Hinduism, first of all affirms the Supreme Principle, the Infinite, and then proceeds to deduce both doctrine and method from that principle. By comparison, the human fact must necessarily represent an element belonging to a lesser order. On the other hand the steadfast refusal of Buddhism to attach any term corresponding to a concept, even under all possible safeguards, to *Nirvāṇa*, to the Ultimate Reality, (a refusal which is carried by Nāgārjuna to its extremest expression in his doctrine of the 'voidness of all *dharma*s') springs from the fact that the standpoint taken up is that of the 'Inexpressible', which, for that very reason, is never even mentioned as such.

doctrine of Śaṅkara it is for the opposite reason. The perspective of Śaṅkara goes beyond that of Rāmānuja, not merely in respect of its form, but in respect of its very basis.

In order really to understand Nāgārjuna, or the Mahāyāna in general, one must before everything else take account of two facts, namely, first that Buddhism presents itself essentially as a spiritual method and so subordinates everything to the point of view of method and, secondly, that this method is essentially a negative one. From this it follows that, on the one hand, metaphysical reality is considered in function of method, that is as 'state' and not as 'principle', and, on the other hand, it is conceived in negative terms: *Nirvāṇa*, 'Extinction', or *Śūnya*, the 'Void'. In Buddhist wisdom "affirmation" has the same sense and function as "ignorance" in Hindu wisdom. To describe *Nirvāṇa*, *Śūnya*, in positive terms would amount—speaking as a Vedāntist—to wishing to know the pure Subject, the 'divine Consciousness', *Ātmā*, on the plane of objectivation itself, that is to say, on the plane of ignorance.

When Western people refer to something as being 'positive' they almost always think of manifestation or the created; hence their preference for the perspective of Rāmānuja and their mistake in attributing 'abstractions' to Śaṅkara—or to Plato for that matter.

God is 'abstraction' for the world because the world is 'abstraction' in relation to God.<sup>1</sup> Now it is God who is real, not the world.

People often believe that the content of a statement is false to the extent that the enunciation can be attacked by dialectics. Now every statement the content of which is not a

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<sup>1</sup> Note here that the word 'God' does not and cannot admit of any restriction for the simple reason that God is 'all that is purely principial' and that He is thus also—and *a fortiori*—'Above-Being'; this one may not understand or may deny, but one cannot deny that God is 'that which is supreme' and therefore also that which nothing can surpass.

fact capable of being checked physically or rationally, that is to say every transcendent truth, can be contradicted by arguments drawn from experience. Śaṅkara never said that the inevitably human formulation of truth, bearing for instance on absolute 'Consciousness', could not be attacked. When the *Advaitins* say that 'Consciousness' has such and such a nature and that the example of deep sleep shows it, this does not in any way imply that they themselves had need of this example or that they could be discomfited by a demonstration of the unavoidable gaps to be found in it. Clearly it is not because of an opposite aspect but because of an analogy that one has recourse to an example. Opposite aspects do exist but they are not relevant here. If we say that, compared to an opaque body, any light is like the sun, the fact that this light has neither the form, nor the dimensions, nor the material substance of the sun is absolutely without significance in respect of the relationship envisaged; moreover, if the example differed in no way from the thing to be demonstrated, it would be, not an example, but the thing itself.

Intellectual intuition communicates *a priori* the reality of the Absolute.

Rationalist thought infers the Absolute by starting from the relative; thus it does not proceed by intellectual intuition though it does not inevitably exclude it.

For philosophy arguments have an absolute value; for intellectual intuition their value is symbolical and provisional.

Śaṅkara did not 'construct a system';<sup>1</sup> he did not 'seek a solution' of such and such a 'problem'. He did not suffer from what he himself calls the disease of doubt.

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<sup>1</sup> By this is meant an association of concordant reasonings, hierarchically arranged. It is true that one can always describe an orthodox doctrine as a 'system' when comparing it to some system in nature, such as the solar system; in fact a doctrine is by the very force of things an assemblage of ideas which group themselves harmoniously round a central idea from which they derive according to various 'dimensions'.

Śaṅkara is like a colourless glass which allows the rays of light to pass through it unaltered, whereas Rāmānuja might be compared to a coloured glass which also transmits light, but imparts to it a certain tint. This is to say that Rāmānuja's doctrine is likewise inspired and not invented. Sages are instruments for the crystallizing of the pure Light; they are anything but inventors of systems. It is intellection that determines everything; the appropriate expression creates itself in function of the respective traditional form. With philosophers in the ordinary sense of the word the initiative is from the human side, from mental restlessness, from doubt, from lack of contemplative quality; their attitude is 'Promethean', not 'prophetic'.

God cannot change; therefore He cannot be the cause of a change as such. He is the cause of all, and He is consequently cause of what appears to us as change; but he is the cause of it, not inasmuch as it is a change, but inasmuch as this apparent change, real for us, affirms an aspect of the Immutable. Or again, simply to consider change as such, God is its cause only inasmuch as the change in question, or any change, expresses in the language of diversity the divine Infinity or All-Possibility.

The world, inasmuch as it is subject to change, cannot have God for its cause; from the standpoint of its negative character the world is not. On the other hand change, inasmuch as it expresses infinity—not inasmuch as it negates immutability—must have God for its cause, and in that respect the world does exist, even though in the last analysis it is reducible to that cause itself. An effect, to the extent that it is ontologically positive, is not really distinct from its cause.

It has sometimes been argued that the delivered sage, the *vidvān*, having attained the state whence there is no return (into the 'kārmic' chain of 'saṁsāric' existences) has passed beyond our ken and can consequently no longer speak or

teach. Now the *Advaitins* have never denied the double nature of the *vidvān*. If Christianity were not the religion of the West and if the two-fold nature of Christ were not a dogma, no doubt those Western philosophers who look for contradictions in the Vedānta would declare the two natures of Christ to be 'incompatible' and would describe this dogma as an intellectual 'setback'; and they would speak in the same way of the Trinity.

It is contradictory to pretend—in order to contest the reality of the absolute Subject—that the intellectual light is real only in function of its projection on an external object and that it thus has only a relative and extrinsic reality. A contrast can show up the nature of something or can bring out its value, but it cannot create that nature; it could not show up a nature that did not exist. God is Light in Himself and not because He illumines our darkness. On the contrary, He illumines the darkness because He is Light in Itself: He is Love, not because He loves, but He loves because He is Love.

Between the soul and *Brahman* there is at the same time continuity and discontinuity, according to the relationship under consideration; continuity from the point of view of essential nature, which is 'consciousness', and discontinuity from the point of view of 'actual' nature which is either pure 'Consciousness' on the divine side, or objectivized consciousness on the human side—consciousness objectivized in its very cosmic root and consequently darkened, limited and divided by *avidya*, by ignorance. Hence it follows that the individual substance, even when empirically emptied of its 'objective' content, is thereby in no wise relieved of the fundamental vice of objectivation, which can only be eliminated by Knowledge.

A being as such, that is, in so far as it represents a mode of objectivation, necessarily envisages the single 'Consciousness'—from which in reality it is not distinct—as 'external'.

The *avatāras* adored God, parallel with their state of 'identity' and on another plane—therefore 'outside' themselves.

The great defect of the soul—the 'original sin'—is not the accidental objectivation which allows that a being is distracted by one object or another, but rather the fundamental objectivation which makes such distraction possible. Now the fundamental objectivation is collective and hereditary; it belongs to the species, and not to the will of the individual.

Pseudo-Vedāntist 'subjectivism'—which in reality is solipsism—is incapable of taking stock of the objective homogeneity of the cosmic environment.

It is *Ātmā* objectivized as *jīvātmā* or *ahankāra* which is the subject of mental objectivation; it is thus a subject already objectivized, secondary and relative.

When the individual empties his mind of all objects he approaches *Ātmā* in a certain symbolical way, but the objectivation represented by the individual as such is not thereby abolished—far from it. Spiritual realization is neither solipsism nor autosuggestion.

Christ could say: "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God." This signifies that everything necessarily participates in the essential attributes of relativity.

Śaṅkarācārya used such expressions as this: "I prostrate myself before *Govinda* whose nature is supreme Bliss. . . ." And Rāmakrishna said: "In the absolute I am not and you are not and God (as Personal God) is not, for the Absolute is beyond all speech and thought. But so long as there still exists something outside myself, I must adore *Brahmā* within the limits of my mind as something which is outside me."

Direct analogy and inverse analogy: in the former case a tree reflected in water will never be anything but a tree, in the latter the reflected tree will always be upside down.

Between God and the world, between the Principle and manifestation, between the Uncreate and the created there is always—but in different relationships—both direct analogy and inverse analogy. Thus the ego is not only a reflection but also a negation of the Self, God can consequently be called the 'Divine I' by analogy with what is positive, conscious and immortal in the human 'I', but He can also be called 'He' in opposition to what the human 'I' includes that is negative, ignorant and unreal. The term 'the Self' expresses both the analogy and the opposition.

To say that Reality can never be attained by one who maintains the 'objective illusion' is to forget that 'union' depends, not at all on some particular terminology, but on the fusion of two distinct elements, whether we call these 'Subject' and 'Object' or something else; such a statement amounts to replacing the objective illusion, which is normal, since it is general, by a subjective illusion—an abnormal and hence far more dangerous illusion. In order to be united to something it is by no means necessary to start by pretending that one is not separate from it in any way or in any relationship or, in fact, that one does not exist; one must not replace intellection by a facile and blind conviction.

It is useless to seek to realize that 'I am *Brahman*' before understanding that 'I am not *Brahman*'; it is useless to seek to realize that '*Brahman* is my true Self' before understanding that '*Brahman* is outside me'; it is useless to seek to realize that '*Brahman* is pure Consciousness' before understanding that '*Brahman* is the Almighty Creator'.<sup>1</sup>

It is not possible to understand that the enunciation 'I am not *Brahman*' is false before having understood that it is true. Similarly it is not possible to understand that the

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<sup>1</sup> 'No man cometh unto the Father but by me' said Christ. The following *hadith* bears the same meaning: 'He who desires to meet Allah must first meet His Prophet.'

enunciation '*Brahman* is outside me' is not exact before having understood that it is; and, similarly again, it is not possible to understand that the enunciation '*Brahman* is the Almighty Creator' enfolds an error before having understood that it expresses a truth.

If, in order to be able to speak of the Self, one must have realized the Self, how can one who has not realized it know that one must have realized it in order to be able to speak of it? If some sage can alone know what the Self is, because he has himself realized it, how can his disciples know he has realized it and that he alone knows what the Self is?

Under these conditions there would remain only absolute ignorance face to face with absolute knowledge, and there would be no possible contact with the Self, no spiritual realization and no difference between the intelligent man and the fool, or between truth and error. To attribute to knowledge a purely subjective and empirical background which is at the same time absolute amounts to the very negation of intellect, and consequently of intellection. At one stroke this is a negation of inspiration and of revelation. In other words this is a denial, first, of intelligence, then, of its illumination by the Self and, finally, of the Prophetic and Law-giving manifestation of the Self in a given world. And so it means the destruction of tradition, for in these conditions the uniqueness and permanence of the Veda would remain inexplicable. Every 'being who had attained to realization' would write a new Veda and found a new religion. The *Sanātana Dharma* would be a concept devoid of meaning.

Intellection, inspiration, revelation. These three realities are essential for man and for the human collectivity. They are distinct one from another, but none can be reduced simply to a question of 'realization'. The 'realized' man can have inspirations that are—as to their production—distinct from his



state of knowledge,<sup>1</sup> and on the other hand he could not add one syllable to the Veda. Moreover inspirations may depend on a spiritual function, for instance on that of a Pontiff,<sup>2</sup> just as they may also result from a mystical state. As for revelation, it is quite clear that the most perfect spiritual realization could not cause it to occur, although such realization is its *sine qua non*.

Intellection, for its part, is an essential condition of the realization in question, for it alone provides human initiative with its sufficient reason and its efficacy. This fundamental role of pure intelligence is an aspect of 'becoming what one is'.

Revelation is, in a certain sense, the intellection of the collectivity, or rather it takes the place of that. For the collectivity as such this is the only way of knowing, and it is for this reason that the *avatāra* through whom the revelation is brought about must, in his normalizing perfection, incarnate the humanity which he both represents and illuminates.

This also explains why the prayer of a saint is always a prayer of all and for all.

To believe, as do certain 'neo-yogists', that 'evolution' will produce a superman 'who will differ from man as much as man differs from the animal or the animal from the vegetable' is a case of not knowing what man is. Here is one more example of a pseudo-wisdom which deems itself vastly superior to 'those separatist religions', but which in point of fact shows itself more ignorant than the most elementary of catechisms. For the most elementary catechism does know what man is: it knows that by his qualities and like an autonomous

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<sup>1</sup> There are very many instances of this: thus Śrī Ramaṇa Maharshi said that his stanzas (*Uḷḷadu Nāṛpadu* or *Sad-Vidyā*) came to him as if 'from outside'. And he even described how they became fixed in his mind without the collaboration of his will.

<sup>2</sup> Such as the Pope of Rome. This is directly related to 'grace of state', 'authority', 'infallibility' and the 'presence of the Holy Spirit' —to use a Christian terminology.

world he is opposable to the other kingdoms of nature taken together; it knows that in one particular respect—that of spiritual possibilities, not that of animal nature—the difference between a monkey and a man is infinitely greater than that between a fly and a monkey. For man alone<sup>1</sup> is able to come forth from the world; man alone is able to return to God; and that is the reason why he cannot in any way be surpassed by a new earthly being. Among the beings of this earth man is the central being; this is an absolute position; there cannot be a centre more central than the centre, if definitions have any meaning.

This neo-yogism, like other similar movements, pretends that it can add an essential value to the wisdom of our ancestors; it believes that the religions are partial truths which it is called upon to stick together, after hundreds or thousands of years of waiting, and to crown with its own naive little system.

It is far better to believe that the earth literally is a disk supported by a tortoise and flanked by four elephants than to believe, in the name of 'evolution', in the coming of some 'superhuman' monster.

A literal interpretation of cosmological symbols is, if not positively useful, at any rate harmless, whereas scientific errors—such as evolutionism—are neither literally nor symbolically true; the repercussions of their falsity are beyond calculation.

The intellectual poverty of the neo-yogist movements provides an incontestable proof that there is no spirituality without orthodoxy. It is assuredly not by chance that all these movements are as if in league against the intelligence; intelligence is replaced by a thinking that is feeble and vague instead of being logical, and 'dynamic' instead of being contemplative. All these movements are characterized by an affectation of detachment in regard to pure doctrine. They hate its

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<sup>1</sup> Animals and other peripheral beings have, as such, no possibility of coming forth from the world. They must first enter a 'central' state.

incorruptibility, for in their eyes this purity amounts to mere 'dogmatism'; they fail to understand that Truth does not deny forms from the outside, but transcends them from within.

Orthodoxy includes and guarantees indescribably precious values which man could not possibly draw out of himself.

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We must now pass over to the consideration of a question which, though somewhat remote from the main subject of this chapter, yet has an important bearing on certain contemporary movements connected indirectly with Vedānta, as well as on the spiritual life generally: we are referring to the question of Self-realization as attained by Śrī Rāmakrishna Paramahansa and to his relations, as Master, with his disciple Narendra, Swami Vivekānanda as he later came to be known. This episode is instructive in many ways, both for those whose aspirations draw them to the Way of Knowledge and for those others whose approach to Truth lies along the *bhaktic* path. Most often, however, it is a case of blending these two attitudes, with a bias in one or other direction, since the distinction between the *margas*, though theoretically clear enough, rarely remains so sharp in practice; for this reason a closer study of the life of Bengal's great saint at the end of the last century is especially rewarding, because of the light it throws upon an ever-present spiritual problem.

By virtue of his unalterable individual substance Śrī Rāmakrishna was a *bhakta*. Now a *bhakta* is not a man who 'thinks', that is, one whose individuality actively participates in supra-individual knowledge and who consequently knows how 'himself' to apply his transcendent knowledge to cosmic and human contingencies. This amounts to saying that the *bhakta* attains and possesses knowledge, not in an intellectual, but in an ontological way. On the individual level the thinking of a *bhakta* reduces itself in a manner of speaking to the 'planetary system' of his personal realization; for the rest,

it is the whole tradition, that from which the *bhakta* sprang, which 'thinks' for him; it is this tradition which settles all problems situated outside the 'system' in question. The objection that Rāmakrishna was also a *jñāni* is not valid here, for, quite apart from the fact that the distinction between *jñāna* and *bhakti* is before all else a principal one and in no way excludes, in point of fact, an indefinite number of combinations between these two, the human substance of the Paramahansa was plainly *bhaktic*; *jñāna* was able to deepen this human substance, but not to alter it. A sage is not a mere general type but a 'living' man; but for this there would be no diversity among *muktas*; the most perfect knowledge never does away with this diversity; the individual substance always remains qualitatively what it is.

It is very typical of Rāmakrishna that he does not 'think'<sup>1</sup> but tries to provoke oracles; it is Heaven that must think for him. It was Heaven for instance, which had to solve the problem of knowing how the scriptural affirmation that "gold is clay and clay is gold" was to be understood—a question which the *jñāni* Śaṅkarācārya would have settled in a moment (as regards realization) and at one stroke of the pen (as regards dialectic). This type of procedure is perfectly legitimate within the framework of *bhakti*, since, as we have said, it is *a priori* not 'intellectual'; *bhakti* plumbs mysteries through 'being', not through 'intelligence', and this ontological plasticity enables it to realize a point of view from which it can even appear as superior to 'intellectuality' when the latter is conceived merely under its mental and external aspect.

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<sup>1</sup> We have put this word in inverted commas to indicate whatever of approximation and of finer shades of meaning it implies. Human language could not do justice to all possible shades of the Real. To the easy retort that Rāmakrishna did 'think'—which of course is not in doubt—we should reply that it is not possible for us to write whole volumes about words.

To say that Rāmakrishna took up a standpoint where doctrinal truth no longer counted would be senseless; on the other hand it must be said that he readily came to look on opinions as 'forms' expressing—in what they contained that was positive—an underlying basis of truth, or, in other words that he loved to discover at the root of opinions one single and self-same essence; therefore he did not place himself *a priori* at the intellectual point of view of orthodoxy, but at the ontological point of view of reality.

Rāmakrishna was especially representative of 'realization' inasmuch as it relativizes 'theory' or annuls it; he did not, like Śaṅkara, represent 'Self' inasmuch as It objectivizes itself through doctrine. From this it follows that, with Rāmakrishna, 'argumentation' could not be intellectual as it was with Śaṅkara, but had to be—if one can so express it—existential or ontological. This it is which explains why he did not reply to the doubts of his disciple Narendra by means of a doctrinal demonstration but by an experience of 'realization', of a state of consciousness, and so of 'being', not of 'thinking'. But it also explains a certain lack of intellectual instinct in Rāmakrishna: he took Narendra's mental dynamism as marking an aptitude for *jñāna*—that kind of dynamism of which he was himself devoid. And herein lay his mistake: he wanted to place this 'intelligence', which was foreign to him, at the service of 'realization' without having taken into account, first that intelligence is a different thing from mental power and, secondly, that the latter, when not determined by pure intellect, is prejudicial to that very 'realization' which was precisely the 'all in all' in the spirituality of Rāmakrishna. In this there was something like a temptation or seduction: instead of keeping strictly to what was in tune with his nature and spiritual genius, the master encroached indirectly on ground that was no longer his own, that of doctrinal intellectuality. He believed no doubt that he must give his

message of 'realization' an 'intellectual' dimension of which he himself stood in no need and which in fact betrayed him.

As we have said his strength lay in 'realization', not in 'theory'; it is precisely for this reason that he could, indeed had to, 'incarnate' that which is to be found at the heart of every revelation and which is beyond all theoretical expression. Nonetheless, however paradoxical this may seem, his strength was also his weakness: he abhorred study and under-estimated the scope of mental formulations; but mental formulations did, from their side, busy themselves with him, surrounding him as they did on every side. False opinions made too little impression on him, who saw, at the basis of all things, only the divine 'Mother'. He could himself abstain from 'thinking', but such was not the case for other people, least of all when the invading proximity of a spirit of criticism and discussion made thinking indispensable if only for reasons of defence.

In Rāmakrishna there is something which seems to defy every category: he was like the living symbol of the inner unity of religions; he was, in fact, the first Saint deliberately wishing to penetrate 'foreign' spiritual forms, and in this consisted his exceptional and in a sense universal mission—that something which, without making of him a prophet in the strict sense of the word, does make him akin to the prophets. In the present time of confusion, disarray and doubt he was the saint called to 'verify' forms and 'reveal', if one can so express it, their single truth. This function is self-sufficing and in any case excludes the establishment of an organization seeking to represent a 'super-religion'. The affirmation of the spiritual equivalence of the great revelations could not have become the object of a system, still less of a method, without implying a contradiction and a pleonasm. What should have been done was to collect the spiritual heritage of Rāmakrishna in its strictly Hindu form, whilst at the same time expressly maintaining, as characteristic of the Saint, the idea of traditional

universality. The *āśram* should have been established at Dakṣineśwar near the temple and near the *pañchavati*, the grove planted by the Paramahamsa and sanctified by his meditations and his visions. This hallowed spot could have become a place of pilgrimage consecrated to the cult of the 'Mother' and also to the veneration of the great foreign *Avatāras*: the Buddha,<sup>1</sup> Christ and the Prophet.<sup>2</sup>

The danger for the Paramahamsa lay in the following factors: first of all a *jñāna* extrinsically ill-supported because too experimental in fact, whence an inadequate integration of the mind in his perspective; then a universalism which was too facile because purely *bhaktic*, and lastly the dissolving influence of modernism. If there was in him something like a partial error, a fatal imperfection, it lay there; and it was as if centred in the person of Narendra. Each of them was the ideal and the victim of the other. Narendra had affirmed that he loved nothing more than absorption in *samādhi*; he wished for nothing better—and for that no one could blame him. But the universalism of Rāmakrishna was looking for other modalities; the Paramahamsa, with the extraordinary plasticity of his genius, wished to realize himself indefinitely through all possible modes; he wished to make of Narendra an unlimited being, because he believed he had discovered in the substance of the disciple and in the complementary polarity of their common substance a pledge of universality and of unlimited possibilities. Narendra 'incarnated' in a natural, not in a superhuman way, all that was humanly lacking in the tender and fragile Rāmakrishna, unlettered country brāhmin that he was; Narendra was his complement, his *alter ego*, his *śakti*.

<sup>1</sup> The Buddha is 'foreign' in the sense that he stepped out of the Hindu framework and that his radiance, with certain exceptions, includes only peoples of the yellow race.

<sup>2</sup> Only those are named with whom Rāmakrishna was directly concerned and who also regulate by far the most important religions outside Hinduism.

The *jñāna* of Rāmakrishna, for which a lack of intellectual aptitude is not an obstacle, is not strictly *jñāna* as such. And herein lies the vulnerability of his perspective: it lies in his almost exclusive faith in the spiritual all-powerfulness of love. Fundamentally, he does not put to himself the question of knowing whether men are 'in the truth' or 'in error'; what he asks is: "Do they love God?". In a word he makes himself *jñāni* through love, or, in a more profound sense, through thirst for reality, for unlimitedness, for the Infinite—not through knowledge in the direct sense. He cleaves in twain the figure of the Mother, the supreme 'illusion', because he 'wants', not because he 'knows'. He 'knows' in some sort *a posteriori* and not *a priori* like the pure *jñāni*. This weakness is not in itself a defect, provided the homogeneity of the spiritual system is maintained. However, this vulnerability of the perspective of Rāmakrishna, his single faith in the saving power of *bhakti* to the point of despising doctrinal guarantees, was bound to entail another weakness, namely an under-estimating of the powers of illusion. There is nothing in the perspective of Rāmakrishna which compels us to claim that it was absolutely impermeable to illusion on the level of facts: the plastic, candid and ingenuous temperament of the Saint can but reinforce this impression.<sup>1</sup> It must be added however that these illusions would have remained harmless in the enclosed system of a pure Hinduism, and one may even ask oneself whether, in this framework, the things that we can recognise as illusory after the event would not have shown themselves as real under the influence of the appropriate spiritual climate.

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<sup>1</sup> We must never forget the disproportion that subsists between spiritual reality and individuality. From a strictly spiritual point of view no illusion was possible to Rāmakrishna. "To claim that 'I am He' is not a healthy attitude. Whoever entertains this ideal without first having overcome the consciousness of the physical ego, the same will suffer great hurt, his progress is retarded and little by little he is dragged downwards. He deceives others and deceives himself, remaining, as he does, in absolute unawareness of his own lamentable state". (*The Gospel of Śrī Rāmakrishna*).



Another aspect of the enigma of Rāmakrishna is his universalism. Here again there exists a fatal antinomy. Integral universality, which leaves no dimension outside itself, requires by its very nature the prophetic function. The universality of Rāmakrishna was a universality without prophethood. A deviation was inevitable from the moment that people sought to give to this unique universalism a collective and quasi-religious expression. Nothing could have been more contrary to the spirit of Rāmakrishna.

Then came a last fatality, the modernist influence; and it was decisive. The insufficiently doctrinal character of the *jñāna* of Rāmakrishna and his lack of discernment in regard to ideal forms (which seemed not to exist for him), then his ill-defined and somewhat imprudent universalism and, lastly, the dynamic and sentimental tendencies of Vivekānanda—all this would have been free from drawbacks within the framework of a Hinduism that was whole, closed, and free from fissures; for then the environment would have rectified, neutralized and counterbalanced whatever there might have been of the 'subjective', 'fragile' or 'dangerous' in certain attitudes of the Paramahansa.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, an integral or total Hinduism would not have allowed Vivekānanda to open up his mind to that Occidentalism which was unknown and incomprehensible to Rāmakrishna but which stimulated in the disciple those very tendencies the development of which had at times been feared by his master.<sup>2</sup> Everywhere in the

<sup>1</sup> The monotheistic religions, with their invariable dogmatism and formal homogeneity, possess a real advantage here in the sense that their very structure opposes the deviations to which *bhakti* is liable. The structure of Hinduism is too primordial not to be terribly vulnerable at such a period as our own. It is almost impossible for contemporary *bhaktas* to remain entirely orthodox.

<sup>2</sup> On the subject of Narendra the Master had two certainties: that of his spiritual possibility and that of his activity in the world; but he had no certainty as to the actualization of this possibility nor as to the quality of this activity among men, in spite of certain partial intuitions which were unilaterally and 'subjectively' interpreted. Had Rāmakrishna

existence of the Master there were interferences—abnormal and incalculable in relation to the possibilities of the Hindu world—from the modern West, starting with the *Ārya-Samāj* and the *Brahmo-Samāj*.<sup>1</sup> Thus the Paramahansa found himself, quite against his inclination and moreover quite unsuspectingly, at the crossroads of two worlds between which there was no common measure. His truly primordial simplicity and candour, even his modesty, were unequal to the ‘heights’,—or rather one should say the ‘depths’—of these conditions, of which he grasped neither the governing principle nor the complexity.

It is here that a disturbing misapprehension appears in Rāmakrishna: in wanting Narendra to ‘go beyond *samādhi*’ and not remain content with ‘so limited an ideal’ but become, like his master, ‘*jñāni* and *bhakta* both together’, Rāmakrishna attributed to his disciple a genius for ontological and plastic realization which the latter neither possessed nor could have possessed. In order to realize *jñāna*, Narendra would have had to begin by an intellectual comprehension of the traditional doctrine instead of interpreting the Vedānta through

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possessed that certainty there would have been nothing to fear. Now “Narendra was a sceptic, with no faith in the Hindu gods. He laughed at many of the injunctions of the Hindu scriptures. Yet Śrī Rāmakrishna instructed him with the infinite love and patience of an ideal teacher. He was full of admiration for Narendra’s pure character and strength of mind. But he had apprehensions for him in one respect. He knew that the boy was endowed with rare potentialities, a fraction of which was sufficient to make of him a powerful figure in the world, but, if this tremendous energy was not directed into a spiritual channel, it might be misused. He might become the founder of a new sect or party, but that was not his mission.” (*Life of Śrī Rāmakrishna*, published by Śwami Vireswarānanda).

<sup>1</sup> A characteristic feature: his rejection of the *Brahmo-Samāj* heresy had no doctrinal vigour, but rather remained vague and instinctive. Whereas Śaṅkara or Rāmānuja would have thundered at the *Brahmo-Samāj* Rāmakrishna frequented these sectaries as friends. If there was generosity in this attitude there was also a measure of unconsciousness that the sages of old would have called ‘blameworthy’. On the other hand this ‘tolerant’ view can be explained by a presentiment of an inevitable adaptation of India to the modern world.

modern concepts and tendencies.<sup>1</sup> He could not, like his Master, whose spiritual plasticity was of a miraculous order, realize *jñāna* as it were in a *bhaktic* way, or rather in an ontological and thus extra-doctrinal way. But there was more to it than that: this perfect simultaneity of *jñāna* and *bhakti* indicates a universality proper to prophets: if Rāmakrishna considered that contemplation in *samādhi* was too limited for Narendra, this means that he wished, at least in practice, to turn him into a prophet, for beyond sainthood there is only prophethood.<sup>2</sup> Only a prophet has need, in order to be able to accomplish his mission, to possess all the spiritual modes. It is true that such a universality can affirm itself likewise in a saint who has no prophetic mandate, but this is exceptional and moreover always implies a mission analogous to that of prophethood within the religion from which the saint has sprung. Such precisely was the case of Rāmakrishna, and of him alone within the framework of the Hindu world of our times.

With Rāmakrishna there was something like an unconscious encroachment on the prophetic function. Nevertheless he never pretended to be the founder of a religion, quite the contrary; but at the same time he did nothing to prevent such a thing from arising in his name. His excessive independence in respect of orthodoxy was bound indirectly to engender this error.<sup>3</sup> It was an independence which, precisely, befits the

<sup>1</sup> See additional note at the end of this chapter (page 45).

<sup>2</sup> Prophethood is not a degree of sanctity; the latter may be supreme without the prophetic office being added to it. On the other hand prophethood always presupposes supreme sanctity.

<sup>3</sup> We know there are contemplatives of the line of Rāmakrishna whose spirituality is impeccable, whatever may be their personal feelings on the subject of Swāmi Vivekānanda. Already in the time of the latter, Swāmi Brahmānanda was teaching a perfectly regular doctrine; if he none the less admired the books of Vivekānanda, perhaps for the simple reason that he admired the man, it was with that strange faculty for paradox that characterizes partially Westernized Orientals and renders them prone to thinking as if with two distinct brains.

function of a prophet alone; only a prophet has nothing to learn and must offer himself as a white and virgin page to the divine Pen.

It would be possible to find an explanation of the enigma of Rāmakrishna and Vivekānanda in the fact that the rise of Hindu nationalism had become inevitable and that Vivekānanda was its predestined inspirer; that in order to be able to play this part he had need of the dynamic quality of the West and of certain of its ideological premises as well; that from this angle his exaggerations and errors were only provisional, and that herein lies the meaning of the master's prediction that "Naren will shake the world to its very foundations". If it be admitted that for a Hindu the world is India, then Rāmakrishna saw aright: Vivekānanda did give an impulse to Hindu nationalism and in his absence it might well have received an impulse the character of which would have been materialistic and satanic. In 'modernizing' Hinduism Vivekānanda did at the same time 'Hinduize' modernism, if one may so put it, and by that means some of its destructive impetus was neutralised. In a word, if it was inevitable that India should become a 'nation', it was preferable that it should become one in some way under the distant auspices of a Rāmakrishna rather than under the sign of a modernism that brutally contradicted everything that India had stood for during thousands of years.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gandhi's nationalism with its pure and ascetic form, its moderate character and its style, which is, after all, quite Hindu compared with materialistic and mechanized nationalisms, was able to develop as it did thanks largely to the impulse Vivekānanda had given it. This was indeed a two-edged sword, if you will, but India had no choice; and after his own fashion Rāmakrishna seems to have had a presentiment of this. No doubt some will object that any modernization, whether 'Hinduizing' or not, will by its very nature always end in a loss of spiritual values. This is true, but an influence which for any reason retards this process has none the less its usefulness. It is clearly impossible to liken a Vivekānanda and a Gandhi to the creator of the 'New Turkey' or any other of the protagonists of extreme modernism. And again, taking account of the

In the life of Vivekānanda there is an almost continual conflict between his powerful, proud nature and the 'presence' of Rāmakrishna—that spiritualized psychic force which the master had transmitted to him and which actualized itself for a last time in Vivekānanda during the hours before his death. This final grace the master owed to him—the master who had chosen this anguished and haughty substance and had besprinkled it with the dew of his beatitude only to set it adrift afterwards in the whirlpool of two worlds that were battering and penetrating one another.

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In Śrī Ramaṇa Maharshi one meets again ancient and eternal India. The Vedāntic truth—the truth of the Upaniṣads—is brought back to its simplest expression but without any kind of betrayal. It is the simplicity inherent in the Real, not the denial of that complexity which it likewise contains, nor an artificial and quite external simplification such as springs from ignorance.

That spiritual function which can be described as 'activity of presence' found in the Maharshi its most rigorous expression. Śrī Ramaṇa was as it were the incarnation, in these latter days and in face of the modern activist fever, of what is primordial and incorruptible in India. He manifested the nobility of contemplative 'non-action' in the face of an ethic of utilitarian agitation and he showed the implacable beauty of pure truth in the face of passions, weaknesses and betrayals.

The great question "Who am I?" appears, with him, as concrete expression of a reality that is 'lived', if one may so put it, and this authenticity imparts to each word of the sage a flavour of inimitable freshness—the flavour of Truth when it is embodied in the most immediate way.

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lack of sense of proportion which seems to be the price paid for all *bhakti*, Vivekānanda's 'shaking of the world' may also mean the renown he won outside India.

The whole of Vedānta is contained in the Maharshi's question "Who am I?"

#### ADDITIONAL NOTE TO PAGE 42

Narendra might have been a born *bhakta*, only one accidentally deformed by false education in school. Under no circumstances could he have been a *jñāni* who had perfected his realization (*sādhana*) in a previous existence, and to discover this there was no need to plunge him into a passive state of *samādhi* in order to quieten him; it would have been enough to take stock of the natural criteria, of obvious and indisputable data. A sage who had perfected his *sādhana* and who, by reason of this fact, is born with 'innate wisdom' proves his spiritual nature by accepting at the first opportunity and with the alacrity of genius, every manifestation of Truth. A man who, like the young Narendra, "missed no chance of turning the doctrine of *Advaita* to ridicule" (*Life of Śrī Rāmakrishna*), could not be a *jñāni* 'incarnate'. But this argument is quite superfluous if one knows the writings of Vivekānanda, which contain such things as this: "Jesus was not perfect because he did not give woman a place equal to that of man. Women did everything for him but yet he was so much the slave of Jewish custom that not one of them was made an apostle." "The visions of Moses are more likely to be false than our own because we have more knowledge at our disposal and are less subject to illusions" (*Inspired Talks*). "The Buddhas and Christs we know are heroes of second grade compared with those greater ones of which the world knows nothing. Hundreds of these unknown heroes have lived in every land" (*Karma-Yoga*). "We have seen that the theory of a personal God who created the world cannot be proved. Is there still today a single child who could believe in it? . . . Your personal God, Creator of this world, has he ever succoured you? This is the challenge now flung down by modern science!" (*Conference on the Vedānta*). "The totality of all living beings is the personal God" (A letter to Sister Nivedita). Such absurdities as these would be inconceivable in a Hindu who was not already modernized, just as they would be in an orthodox Christian. Rāmakrishna could not foresee effects the causes of which he had not even imagined. What would he have said had he had a knowledge of the opinions quoted—and of many others—utterly contrary as they were to his own teaching? No euphemism could diminish the brutality of these contradictions.

### CHAPTER III

#### SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND THE WESTERN SEEKER

THAT the Way of Knowledge, *Jñāna Mārga*, is among spiritual ways the highest and, in a still more ultimate sense, that it is *the* spiritual way as such, the one in which all other ways finally must merge, is a fundamental truth to which all traditional teachings bear witness either openly or else by implication. Therefore it is logical and legitimate to describe those doctrines and methods that keep closest to pure Knowledge (for no formal expression can coincide with it absolutely) as the "highest" ways open to man, of which the Hindu *Vedānta* provides an example that conforms in its presentation as near as is conceivably possible to the goal it sets itself, which is Deliverance total and unqualified.

This placing of Knowledge at the apex of the hierarchy of values, as the one in terms of which all others have to be assessed, can also be expressed by saying, with Śrī Śaṅkarācārya, that Knowledge delivers and that it alone delivers. The same truth was enunciated by the Buddha, under the negative form that characterises his dialectic, when he declared the root of suffering to be want of Knowledge, Ignorance. Moreover the essential characteristic of Ignorance, as Śrī Śaṅkarācārya has also shown, is "false attribution", taking for self that which is not self; hence also the Buddhist doctrine of *anātmā* which, when viewed against the whole background of the *Saṃsāra*, reveals itself as an apophatic form of the same enunciation, one from which the final term, as being inexpressible, has been omitted.

In India this supremacy and ultimacy of Knowledge has for so long been treated as almost a commonplace of spiritual instruction that it is very difficult for anyone brought up in Hindu surroundings, even a *bhakta*, to enter into the mental workings of a person, like the average European, to whom this idea is either entirely strange or at best understood in a blurred and confused way. Things that to the former seem able so to be taken for granted as to make it needless even to mention them will, for the latter, be far from self-evident; and if this be true of the principle itself it becomes doubly so when it is a case of applying it to some more contingent question, where a nice discernment is called for in order to sort out the various factors concerned. This intellectual gap between two mentalities has in the past, when contacts were few and far between, been slurred over by means of conventional descriptions applied to the other party which, as statements of fact, hardly bear looking into; this is especially true of Christian descriptions of Hindu and other non-Christian doctrines. Nowadays, however, with the much increased contact resulting from travel and from the indiscriminate dissemination of the printed word, a new kind of misunderstanding has arisen born of the growing desire, on the part of Europeans, to study, and even in some cases to follow, Eastern spiritual ways, many of them being quite uninformed about certain conditions which must be fulfilled before one adventures into this intellectually unfamiliar territory. What few people have seen for themselves, or been told by those whom they consulted, is that a way will be "dangerous" in proportion to the very subtlety and profundity of the doctrine concerned (typically it is doctrines of *Advaita* under their various forms that are in question); none can presume to handle the highest things with reasonable safety unless that fragile vessel that is his soul has been moulded theoretically and also purified in its substance to the point of being able to



receive the *Amṛta* without cracking or melting under its contact.

This problem is one that the circumstances of our time have rendered particularly acute; one has to face the fact that many persons of European and therefore Christian ancestry have been caused to react strongly, for reasons with which one can often sympathise, against the sentimentality and unintelligence that have increasingly invaded their own traditional home during recent centuries. Those who have not let themselves succumb, without more ado, to the prevailing religious indifference, have almost inevitably been drawn to look in an easterly direction for a corrective to the ills they deplore, with a strong bias in favour of the sapiential doctrines rather than those which, having a *bhaktic* character, reminded them too obviously of Christian modes of expression now grown suspect in their eyes, often mistakenly so. Pursuing this line of inquiry, through reading and in other ways, these seekers have moreover awakened to the fact, familiar to every true Hindu, that Knowledge is not merely a matter of right theory (though this enters in, especially in the early stages) but is something to be "actualised" with the help of a method running parallel to the doctrine and requiring, for its effective communication, the presence of a *guru* or spiritual Master: Knowledge reveals itself when *Prajñā* and *Upāya* are in equilibrium.

It is perhaps not wholly unnatural that such a seeker, brought up as he has been in almost entirely untraditional surroundings, should often be driven by impatience (itself a function of that very ignorance he is minded to remedy) into simplifying the situation to the point of overlooking many factors which, though accessory in the sense of not constituting Knowledge as such, are nonetheless essential to a being who, by definition, is not all made of Knowledge but still has psychic and physical elements needing to be integrated, the process of accomplishing this task being in fact part of the spiritual quest itself.

Another salient fact requiring to be noted, as having a practical bearing on the purpose in view, is that a highly individualistic turn of mind, such as almost every European owes both to his social upbringing and to his heredity, often finds the assimilating of a "non-dualist" view of reality a difficult metaphysical operation even after it has given its assent to the doctrine of *Advaita* in theory; whereas for a Hindu, and especially for a Brāhmin mind, the simultaneous contemplation of pairs of opposites both at the level where their opposition is relatively valid and also in the unity of a common and superior principle where the opposition has no place, comes to it as something quasi-instinctive and this is true even when personal realization itself has not gone very far. When two such different mentalities meet, especially under circumstances where the one is seeking knowledge which the other is supposed to impart, it is extremely important for neither party to under-rate the difficulties of bridging the intellectual and psychological gap—which does not mean that it is unbridgeable, for we are not one of those who believe that East and West have nothing to say to one another, indeed our own view is the reverse of that. What we are however concerned with is, for there to be real communication, free from facile assumptions on either hand, as also from prejudices of a rigid kind. What has been brought home to us time and again while listening to explanations offered by Eastern exponents when addressing Western audiences, or while reading books intended for the same purpose, is that a very necessary prudence is often lacking in persons who, in other respects, are qualified for their task (at least at the theoretical level); much harm can result from rash attempts to put over the most profound doctrines to hearers insufficiently forewarned, because accessory; and to the Eastern exponent self-evident information has been suppressed such as would have provided a natural corrective to many of those confusions that most commonly arise under these circumstances.

Nor must we omit all mention of the dangers consequent today upon the possibility, non-existent in antiquity, of publicising, with the aid of the printing-press and other similar appliances, both a teacher and his teaching in a way that lends itself only too easily to the personal adulation of the one and to the distortion or dilution of the other: the temptation to render a doctrine acceptable by a more or less intentional concealing of truths deemed unpopular at the present time is one to which lesser minds willingly succumb; a cursory glance round the world will show that such "spiritual demagoguery" (if one dare use such a term) is not uncommon. This is especially true of those, be they actual teachers or their close associates and admirers, who while remaining visibly attached to their tradition have themselves become affected, more or less unconsciously, by profane teachings emanating from the modern West which they have adopted with an ease that shows the intellectual quality of discernment, *viveka*, to be regrettably lacking. As a corollary to this, the more serious among spiritual teachers are showing an increasing tendency to withdraw themselves as far as possible from the public gaze in order that the wisdom they have to impart may become sufficiently hard of access to filter out, as it were, the unqualified, leaving the door open to those only who, guided thither by the divine Grace, are prepared to pay the proper price.

However, it is not with these more superficial deviations that we will chiefly concern ourselves in the present instance, especially as some references to them have already found place in a previous chapter. Rather we will turn to a type of teaching that, under various forms, has proved of considerable attraction to Europeans and that is presented, by those who would speak in its name, as partaking of the purest *jñānic* essence, free from the slightest admixture of lesser things.

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If we have properly understood certain explanations put forward on behalf of the teachings in question, all that is necessary in *jñāna-mārga* is on the one hand the certainty that "I" am neither the body nor the mind, but *Ātmā*, and on the other hand the presence of a *Guru* who has realized the Absolute; the human and intellectual value of the disciple do not count, neither does the tradition; only *jñāna* itself, and the presence of the *Guru* have any importance.

Now, as is the case with all precious things, *jñāna* can become a mortal poison just as it can signify deliverance; it all depends on the individual nature of the disciple. This nature, in order to be able to realize *Ātmā*, must imply *a priori* a certain conformity with *Ātmā*. If the nature of the disciple is not prepared for *jñāna*, this method can have effects contrary to those which are normally to be expected: identity with the Self, instead of being realized, will be replaced by a sort of fixed idea, a thought artificially grafted upon the mind; instead of leading to any spiritual realization, this false attitude will be the source of an intellectual automatism and of all sorts of vices, such as pride, pretentiousness, obstinacy, mental petrification, dialectical monomania and a lack of sense of the sacred. It is thus imperative that the mind, before being abandoned by the "ego", should be purified, and this is the judgment of all sages in all times.

He then who would follow the *jñāna-mārga* must first of all possess the general virtue of human goodness, and secondly the special intellectual qualification for *jñāna*. The general virtue implies devotion to *Brahman*, and by extension, with regard to mankind, justice, unselfishness, charity in all its forms; for man as such—that is, as mind and body—is rigorously subject to *Brahman* inasmuch as *Brahman* reveals Itself objectively and cosmically. The special qualification for *jñāna* implies a contemplative intelligencē, able to grasp metaphysical truths in all their depth, complexity and subtlety, and able

in consequence to discern exactly the value of things; he who is lacking in intellectual discernment, that is, he who is narrow-minded and illogical and thus incapable of defining exactly the nature of things on the cosmic plane, is no less unqualified to distinguish between the Real and the unreal; in other words, he who cannot tell Truth from error on the relative plane will not be able to tell Reality from unreality either.

Before going further we must answer a possible objection: it might be said, in fact, that there are *jñānins* whose minds do not worship God and who limit themselves to realizing the idea that the mind, whatever it may be doing, is not the real "self". One must not forget, however, that if there are *jñānins* who do not expressly worship God, it is because their minds are *a priori* impregnated with devotion, either through their having worshipped God in their youth, or through their having worshipped Him in former lives, or through their having inherited such minds from countless ancestors who worshipped God. Their minds are thus in a state of natural adoration. In any case, the greatest *jñānins*—such as Śrī Śaṅkara or, in our time, Śrī Ramaṇa Maharshi—showed a devotional attitude which in no way attached them to the mind. Śrī Śaṅkara begins his commentary on the *Brahma-Sūtras* with these words: "Reverence to the august *Vāsudeva*!" and his hymn to *Hari* with these words: "I praise, with devotion, the All-pervading (*Viṣṇu*), Who Himself without origin, is the origin of the universe!" And he begins his *Vivekacūḍāmaṇi* with these words: "I prostrate myself before *Govinda* whose nature is supreme Felicity!" Śrī Ramaṇa Maharshi says in his hymns to *Aruṇācala*: "Gracious *Gaṇapati*! with thy loving hand bless me!" And: "Save me . . . and honour me with union with Thyself, O *Aruṇācala*!" And again: "I, by Thy grace, am sunk in Thy Self, wherein merge only those divested of their minds and thus made pure, O *Aruṇācala*!" And finally: "Smile with Grace and not with scorn on me, who come to Thee,

O *Aruṇācala!*” And Śrī Rāmakrishna said: “ In the Absolute, I am not, and you are not, and God (in His personal determination) is not, because He (the Absolute) is beyond the reach of all word and all thought. But as long as something still exists outside of me (that is to say, as long as I remain on the plane of individual consciousness), I must adore *Brahman* within the limits of my reason, as being something outside of me.”

As long as the mind exists—that is to say until death—it must worship the Divinity; without this attitude man would never really know that he is not the mind. A mind that worships does not desire to be “ I ”; it is not acting at variance with the knowledge that “ I am not the mind; I am *Ātmā* ”. But a mind which does not bow down before the Godhead is an obstacle to liberation and replaces it by an illusion of liberation; it would be better, however, not to be liberated than to fancy oneself liberated. A fixed idea that “ I am *Ātmā* ” is not the same thing as the consciousness of one’s being *Ātmā*; a madman who imagines himself to be God is not the same thing as a sage who knows that he is God.

In the same way, as regards the virtue required for all spiritual realization, we will say the following: the mind which has not been purified of the sicknesses of the worldly man, which is not free from pride, passion and ugliness of every kind, does not allow the superimposition of the idea “ I am the mind ” to be eliminated. The idea that “ I am not the mind—nor the body—but *Ātmā* ”, only frees from superimpositions on condition that the objectifications—that is, the body, the soul, the intelligence—realize *Ātmā* within the limits of their possibilities: the body by its purity, the soul by its devotion, and the intelligence by its discernment, its logic. If the body is impure through the tyranny of the passions, if the soul is impious by its scorn of God, and if the intelligence is obscured by pretentiousness and partiality, the idea that “ I am neither this body, nor this mind, but *Ātmā* ”, engenders the illusion—

not the consciousness—of being *Ātmā*; and this illusion may engulf man in the torments of the *samsāra*. Ignorance pure and simple is better than an illusion of knowing. The higher the nature of the illusion, the more deadly it is.

There are two sorts of imperfections, of which one sort is active and serious and the other passive and slight; the first of these is an obstacle to realization and must be eradicated; the second is not an obstacle to realization and disappears as a result of it. Pride belongs to the first category.

Whoever transcends and abandons the mind, sacrifices it to the Self. One cannot, however, sacrifice despicable and impure things which are an offence in the sight of the Divinity; one can only sacrifice things which are precious and pure.

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He who has a pure and virtuous mind can become separated from it and can pass beyond it.

But he who has an impure and arrogant mind cannot say: this is but the mind, it is not "I".

One may say: this weakness is not myself; it is the mind.

One cannot say: this pride is not myself, it is the mind. Pride is always "myself"; in other words a proud or arrogant person always identifies himself with his mind, say what he will.

If he persuades himself that he is the Self, he falls into the deepest darkness. It is his mind which empties itself artificially and takes itself for the Self. The Self closes itself to the arrogant individual.

One cannot realize the Self without the Benediction of God. One cannot obtain the Benediction of God without self-effacement.

According to some people, it is enough to convince oneself, as it were by auto-suggestion, that one is neither the body nor the mind. This truth is not realizable, however, until

body and mind have conformed on their plane to what may be called the "Divine Will"; one cannot attain *Ātmā* without God or in opposition to God. The "personal Divinity" only allows those who adore Him to understand that He is not the absolute Reality.

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The Hindus are the most contemplative people in the world; and for thousands of years it has been their habit to consider in themselves what is divine. They say "I am *Ātmā*", "I am *Brahman*", just as their ancestors have done for thousands of years. Pure contemplation has forged the Hindu soul. Often it is able to realize without difficulty what other souls only come to realize with difficulty. The case of Europeans—Christians and Jews—is quite different. The soul of their ancestors was far removed from the Hindu soul. The Jews did not live by contemplation but in fear; their way was a *karma-yoga*. We are not criticising in any way the Jewish religion which is in conformity with the Hebrew mentality; we only point out that it is radically different from the spirituality of the Hindus. The same thing is true moreover, though in a lesser degree, of the Christian religion, which is heir to Judaism. We do not say that a Jew or a Christian can never follow a Hindu *sādhana*; we say that, if they follow it, they must—from a purely human point of view, not from the *jñānic* point of view which is above contingencies—take account of their own mental make-up. They are neither Hindus nor Brāhmins; *jñāna* is more dangerous for them than for men belonging to the élite of India. Being Europeans, they think too much, which gives them an appearance of intelligence; in reality their thought, more often than not, is basically passionate, and has no contemplative serenity whatsoever; the idea that "I am *Brahman*" may easily fill them with pride and contempt, because their ancestors have always thought: "I am a mortal, a sinner", and because their minds,



unless they have been purified by severe disciplines, are not accustomed to bear *jñānic* formulas.

The conviction that one is not the mind but the Self can perfectly well be situated in a secret fold of the mind and not outside it; one who considers God more or less as a creature of man prevents the Divine Grace from coming to his aid and freeing him from the mind. One who despises God—in practice, if not in theory, which amounts to the same thing—in the last analysis despises his own Self; likewise, whoever despises his neighbour unjustly, also despises his Self. We do not believe that a mocking and aggressive spirit can pass beyond the mind and realize *Ātmā*. Pride manifests itself above all in the will to humiliate others uselessly; to contradict uselessly, to deny uselessly, to condemn uselessly.

Europeans are often afflicted with a hidden individualism which it is difficult for a Hindu to imagine; European civilization has been oriented for centuries towards the exaltation of man, of the individual—be it in a rational, sentimental or brutal manner—whereas Hindu civilization, which has never changed in its essence, has been orientated for thousands of years towards what lies beyond man, towards that from which he derives his whole reality and justification.

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Some people try to argue that the *Ṛsis*, who composed the *Vedās*, were simply *Gurus* who gave teachings to disciples of different intellectual levels; that all the teaching given by a perfect sage is situated at the same degree as the *Vedās* and that consequently there is no revelation.

To this we will reply: what is the meaning of the terms *śruti* and *smṛti*, if it be not that there are two essential degrees of revelation? And we will add that revelation is something essentially different from the teaching given by a *Guru* to his disciples; nor does the fact that the *Guru* may have realized the Absolute change anything in this respect. The Absolute,

the Self, does not reveal Itself solely in a subjective manner, that is to say as a normal consequence of spiritual realization thanks to which one may say, even though the words are improper, that the sage is the Self. The Absolute reveals Itself also, to the same sage, in an objective manner, by springing up suddenly in the mind in the form of sacred words; and the Absolute reveals Itself also in the giving of inspired Texts which are to be the support of life and of spiritual realization to an entire civilization; in such a case the Absolute never reveals Itself in subjective mode, except in the case of certain *Avatāras* whose body and mind manifest the Self in a manner eminently more direct than with the ordinary sage; the difference here is not spiritual but cosmological. It is true that in the case of every great *Avatāra* the revelation can be produced in a subjective manner; if this is not always the case, it is because of the form of the respective Revelation, when, for example, the form is obliged to insist on God in his objective function, and not on the essential identity which connects man with the Self.

Revelation cannot proceed from the principal immutability of the *jñānin*, because this identity excludes all happening, but it arises from the distinctness of the person of the sage—support of the Revelation—in relation to the manifestation which he co-ordinates. The moment one considers the fully realized being, or one with a mission, as personality or cosmic axis, it is necessary also to take into account the cosmos into which he brings order.

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If *jñāna* admits of an immense simplification in the sense that it reduces everything to Unity, well and good! But if this simplification is only exterior and artificial and induces one to take a cat for a lantern, no! That the cosmos does not exist, we agree; but on condition that the cosmos, when considered on its own plane, retains its real complexity: in other

words, on condition that things be taken, on their proper plane, for what they are and not for something else.

To see distinctly a part of the cosmos obliges one to see the whole, and also the relationship of this part to the whole.

There are people who imagine that they are able to escape from the complexity of the Subject-Object relationship, by reducing everything to an over-simplified and, therefore, false formula. That a man may wish to know the Self—which he cannot do *qua* man—without claiming *a priori* to know the world, is excellent; but he should not despise for that reason men who know the world by the light of the Self, that is, who know the Self in its cosmic objectivation.

One who preaches grave errors about the world, proves by this fact that he is identified with his mind and not with the Self.

Some will tell us: "But the world does not exist!" If so, wherefore do they speak?

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What we have said about revelation holds good also for initiation, in the general and traditional sense of the word *dikṣā*. Like revelation, initiation is a spiritual reality which the Self manifests in an objective manner, not subjectively. The Self manifests Itself in an objective manner when It addresses Itself to a cosmic entity, to a fundamental human collectivity, to a terrestrial cycle. If the *Guru* be as it were the Absolute this does not alter the fact that in certain circumstances he is obliged to make himself the instrument of objective or cosmic manifestation, regardless of his own realization; that he may also transmit, in such a case, a spiritual influence, emanating not from himself but from the *Ṛṣi*s or from one or another of the *Avatāras* does not alter the fact that he will also transmit his own spiritual influence. But to pretend that he cannot transmit a spiritual influence other than his own, is as if one were to pretend that he could not transmit a teaching

other than his own; in that case there would be nothing left but to burn the *Vedās* and abolish all the *samskāṛās* and all the *dīkṣās*, because each *Guru* would be the Absolute! Also there would no longer remain, for the disciple, any adequate criterion, nor any possible way of distinguishing between a true and a false *Guru*; the *Guru* would no longer be presented and empowered by tradition with its inexhaustible and invincible resources, and he would no longer have any way of taking authority to himself. If everything is reducible to the realization of the *Guru* alone—which is moreover impossible apart from tradition, except in the *Satya-Yuga*—there can be no more tradition, no more *Sanātana-Dharma*, no more *jñāna-mārga* either.

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It is sometimes said that God is “known” by those who are ignorant and “unknown” to the sages; the fact is, however, that God is never presented by any religion as something known, and that is the reason why it is necessary to “believe” in God; consequently God is never the object of man as subject. One should not confuse God with the human conception of God; in this case it is the conception of God which is the object of man as subject, not God Himself who is by definition inaccessible to man as such. One should not confuse our conception of a mountain with the mountain itself. Man does not create God but rather postulates Him from fundamental necessity which is something entirely different. The subject and its object are inseparable but their relation to one another is irreversible; they have a common subject which is neither the one nor the other. The object in itself is not determined by the subject; it is the conception of the object which depends on the subject, not the object itself. A man who sees another man is not the creator of that other man; he is at the most, in a certain relative sense, the “creator”—that is, the determinant—of his own perception. He is the form, not the cause of his knowledge. God, in so

far as He is object, is object of God as subject, not of man as subject; He is his own object, not that of man.

God is not great because man is small, rather it is man who is small because God is great; it is not the smallness of man, body and mind, which makes the greatness of God.

In what way then can man be creator of God? One will say that he can in so far as human limitations determine the conception of God. But who created these human limitations? Is it man who invented them? By no means; he was born with them. It is thus still God who determines man, it is on God that the nature of things depends; if it were otherwise man would be all-powerful; he could cease to be such and such a man and become another; no man however can change his race or sex, no one can add anything whatever to his stature, no one can escape from his destiny; no one, in so far as he is man, can get beyond space and time; no man who lives in the 20th century can return to the 10th century; no one who is born of European parents can cause himself to be born of Hindu parents. Man as such is entirely the creation of God; the relation remains irreversible. To know God, man must cease to be himself; he will then discover that God is his own Essence; that is why a Muslim saint once said: "Glory be to Me", instead of saying: "Glory be to God"; God manifested Himself in this case through his mind, and that is what one might call a direct objectivation of *Ātmā*. Finding God in his own Essence—but here words become almost impossible, because man as such cannot get beyond God; it is only when a complete and radical transformation of man's entire being has occurred and deliverance from all limiting conditions has been attained (which is moreover beyond the power of any individual to achieve simply by his own efforts and without the Grace or assistance of God) that one can rightly speak of a state of union with the Essence, of knowledge of *Brahman* or the Absolute, of pure Consciousness in which God Himself is transcended.

God is *Brahman* in so far as He is the Cause of everything. In Itself *Brahman* is the cause of nothing, because nothing exists: but if one must admit that on the plane of existence, what is, exists, *Brahman* will be the cause of it. The Cause, however, cannot be the effect of its own effect; God cannot therefore be the creation of His creation. It is God who determines the brain of X; it is not the brain of X that determines God, nor even itself. It is God who makes him live and die; if man obtains illumination, that is also by the Grace of God. Without the Grace of God, no man would be able to say: "I am neither this body, nor this mind, I am *Ātmā*". It is God who wills before man wills.

All religions, and also the *Mānava-Dharma-Śāstra*, teach that God has created man in his own likeness. According to certain Neo-Vedāntists, it is man who has created God in his own image. Is it, however, by chance, by individual caprice, that man has created a head, arms, and legs for himself? If he were to follow his fancy, why would he not create the wings of a bird or the fins of a fish for himself? Every being is, first of all with regard to his existence in general, and then with regard to his form in particular, an objectivation of *Ātmā* brought about by *avidyā*; in relation to the animals and plants, however, man is a direct objectivation of *Ātmā*. By his form, man manifests *Brahman* with Its cosmic functions; it is thus *Brahman* that determines the form of man. Consequently, when man speaks of the "Hand of God" or of the divine "Mercy" or "Anger", he speaks rightly and invents nothing, all the more so since *Brahman* Itself describes Itself thus in the sacred Scriptures.

Someone has said that sages never concern themselves with symbolism, but with Reality. In point of fact, however, it is impossible to concern oneself with Reality while leaving symbolism out of account. The symbol—or the symbolical character of everything—is what expresses *Ātmā* in the world.

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At the beginning of this chapter we mentioned the far-reaching effects of spreading information about Eastern doctrines in the Western world in the shape of translated texts and their modern scholarly commentaries; these, though often misleading and even openly profane in tone, have at least made it virtually impossible for any serious-minded person to avoid making certain comparisons between religious ideas familiar to him and those deriving from India, China and other places formerly remote. This fact brings us to mention and also to defend René Guénon, who till recently stood almost alone in presenting to the West the metaphysical doctrines of Hinduism and other Asian traditions in un-adulterated form, accompanied with explanations that neither confused the issue nor distorted the sense of the teachings of which he had become the spokesman; though his work remained unknown to the multitude, it had a profound influence in rousing men of goodwill in the West to recollection of a knowledge that had once been theirs and to awareness of how much had been lost, intellectually and otherwise, with the darkening of that knowledge.

Guénon's is a name that is now beginning to be known also in India, where a number of Hindus of authority have acclaimed him as one of the very rare Westerners who have assimilated the true spirit of Indian wisdom and interpreted it faithfully to their own compatriots. This acclaim on the part of Indians has however not gone without certain criticisms from those whom Guénon's intransigence with regard to many beliefs dear to the heart of the modern world has jolted out of an attitude, in the face of the said beliefs, of complacency that takes itself for tolerance: these would-be critics might first have asked themselves which of the truths enunciated by Hinduism they would have had him first surrender.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> It was indeed possible to differ from Guénon occasionally over certain relatively contingent matters—his historical assessment of Buddhism,

Most of India's Western admirers have wished to reduce her to the plane of the West in one matter or another; they have been incapable of loving India for herself; usually they have loved her in the interests of a more or less disguised Westernism, an "intellectual colonialism", as it were. Westerners are far too prone to find their own philosophies in India and to reduce Hinduism to these; but Guénon wished to know and accept India on her own terms, contrary to Western usage. Such an intention in any person cannot amount to a pure nothing or beget only error; even if there had been nothing more to Guénon's credit than this intention, he would have merited the greatest respect and the deepest gratitude.

He is the first European who ever dared to proclaim, in the West, the superiority of the Hindu spirit over that of the modern West and who was bold enough to criticise openly, in the name of Eastern spirituality as also in the name of the ancient West, modern civilization as it has developed during approximately the last four centuries. It is absurd to pretend, as some have done, that an author whose origins are European and Christian and who studied the Sacred Scriptures of India (in Sanskrit) together with the commentaries of Śrī Śaṅkara and other sages, did not understand anything about the wisdom therein contained. In fact Guénon unhesitatingly placed the Hindu wisdom above all European philosophy and expounded all the fundamental ideas required for the West to gain an understanding of India and her tradition.

Some people have found fault with Guénon on the grounds that in his study of *Vedānta* he at times allowed

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for example, as found in several of his earlier writings, went very wide of the mark, though in fairness it should also be said that at a later date offending passages were removed thanks to criticisms received from Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (whom Guénon greatly respected), Marco Pallis and others; but in the exercise of the central function of restoring the great principles of traditional metaphysic to Western awareness this true *jñānin* gave proof of a universality of understanding that for centuries had had no parallel in the Western world.



himself to digress into cosmology and other subjects alien to the spirit of pure *jñāna*; these critics forget, however, that, addressing himself, as he did, in the first place to European readers unschooled in quite elementary matters connected with the Hindu tradition, he was practically compelled to punctuate his main exposition with considerations which, though of secondary importance in themselves, were yet indispensable for the sake of rendering still deeper questions intelligible to average readers. In any case Guénon never failed to distinguish clearly between what was essential and what belonged to a side-line; no one who has read him with even moderate attention could possibly accuse him of the contrary.

It is of course quite easy, under the pretext of situating oneself above the level of "simple theory", improperly understood at that, to reject the doctrines presented by Guénon; all the same his "General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines" constitutes, for a modern Western mind, an almost indispensable preparation, we do not say for spiritual realization but simply for the first notions which that realization demands. It is necessary to be born in Europe or in America to be able to appreciate this necessity fully, or to discern the degree of incompatibility separating the modern spirit from the Hindu spirit in particular as well as from spirituality in general. That is why in the West it is necessary before everything else to clear the ground; to speak publicly about the "Self" in such surroundings, is to lose one's time or, what is worse, to sow seeds of poison.

If some people disagree with what Guénon has said about reincarnation (he followed the tradition that transmigration is to other worlds and does not take place again on this earth) it must be admitted first of all that Hindus themselves are not in complete agreement about the meaning of transmigration, and secondly that this question itself, like other cosmological questions, is only of subsidiary importance.

Guénon has always written that the doctrine is absolutely insufficient for attaining the truth and that a realization, indispensable complement to the doctrine, is necessary; he has always said that the doctrine has no sense without realization and that realization is not possible without the doctrine. There are some who have reproached him for speaking too exclusively about doctrine; that was his right, however, the moment that he did not claim the role of a *Guru*. The question of why he acted thus is beside the point; all that counts, in such a case, is doctrinal truth.

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To pretend, as some do, that it is necessary to have realized the Self in order to expound and comment on the sacred doctrine, amounts to saying that there is no place for a relative comprehension; this is to pretend that there is only absolute comprehension on the one hand and absolute incomprehension on the other. In point of fact, however, there is no possible contact between the absolute and the nothing. If there is only absolute knowledge, it is useless to speak of it; to whom would one speak about it?

If the *Guru* did not know more than the disciple, the latter would have nothing to learn from him. If the disciple is capable of understanding something (and without that he would not be able to exist) he should also have the right to speak in his turn about what he has understood. There is consequently a traditional orthodoxy; there is not simply an absolute knowledge, the realized truth. If an affirmation were only true in virtue of the "realization" of the one who proclaimed it, no doctrine whatsoever would be possible.

The doctrine cannot be reduced purely and simply to a question of realization, for it is situated on a different plane; on its own plane it is a totality, not part of another plane; understanding of the doctrine depends on intellectual intuition, and not necessarily on realization of the Absolute.

The sage knows that "he" is not the mind. The Truth, however, can manifest itself in the mind independently of the Reality of the *jñānin*: this is Revelation. The mind can be illuminated by the Truth, just as the body can undergo an accident, agreeable or otherwise; the *jñānin* himself remains independent of this. All this has been very well explained by Śrī Rāmaṇa Maharshi when someone asked what was the meaning of his hymns to Aruṇācala; these hymns were not "composed" by him; they "presented" themselves of their own accord without the Maharshi having thought of anything. It is thus, and not otherwise, that sacred Scriptures manifest themselves; the total knowledge of the *jñānin* does not prevent the Truth from incarnating Itself, like a flash of lightning and independently of his will, in his body and mind.

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According to certain people's expressed views, the crucial question is not that of tradition, of initiation or of method, but the question of the *Guru's* own realization. Such a view leaves us with only two alternatives: either a man is not a perfect Sage, and in that case he has no means of knowing whether the *Guru* is a perfect Sage or not; or else a man is himself a perfect Sage, in which case he has no need of a *Guru*. All that the disciple can know is that the *Guru* is spiritually superior to himself; and he is only able to know this thanks to the tradition to which he belongs and from which the *Guru* has issued. When the disciple has attained the degree of his *Guru*, he is at liberty to seek another *Guru*, and so on, as is shown by the example, among others, of Śrī Rāmakrishna whose spiritual realization surpassed, not only that of the Brāhminī Bhairavi, but even that of his second *Guru*, the *jñānin* Totāpuri. In every case, the one thing which is indispensable, is an immediate relation with the embodied Absolute, which "embodiment" can and must in fact assume different forms and cannot depend on anything as conjectural

as the personal realization of such and such a man. The *Veda*, the *Pranava Om*, the divine Name (*Śiva*, *Hari* and others) and the *Guru*, both as such and in virtue of his function, are so many embodiments of the Absolute.

We have heard it said that the Hindus are not in agreement as to the degree of realization of Śrī Rāmakrishna; one can thus have different opinions on this matter, which shows precisely the falsity of the principle according to which it is for the disciple to judge the spirituality of the Master and to determine the degree of his realization.

On the other hand, it is evident that the disciple will seek a *Guru* whose teaching, reputation and personal radiance betoken the highest wisdom. In any case, the fact that the *Guru* Totāpuri was surpassed by his disciple Rāmakrishna in no way indicates that Śrī Totāpuri was a false *Guru* or that Śrī Rāmakrishna was mistaken in allowing himself to be guided by him.

In the same line of thought is the question of the universality of tradition, which amounts in the last analysis to knowing whether the founders of the great religions, such as the Buddha, Christ, Muhammad, possessed perfect wisdom, and whether as a consequence one finds within these religions the methods and Masters necessary to guide one towards the realization of the Self. Now the doctrine of the Self (in other words that which in Hinduism is called the *Vedānta*) is plainly enunciated in certain teachings of these *Avatāras*, and their identity with the Self has been affirmed by them with the greatest clarity; if this be so, there is not the slightest reason to doubt, first of all their own "realization", and secondly the existence, within the respective traditions, of doctrines and methods the purpose of which is to lead those qualified to the same perfect realization: such a doubt cannot possibly arise in any balanced mind. In actual fact among the Buddhists as among the Sūfis, and also in the ancient Christian churches,

there have always been Sages who have proclaimed their identity with the Self, even though they have necessarily been rarer here than in the Hindu world where the most profound truths are enunciated much more openly and more directly than anywhere else. Be that as it may, the thing which matters is not the form but the meaning of the enunciations; that one enunciation may be less direct in its form than another is no proof whatever of a lesser wisdom but solely of a lesser receptivity on the part of the particular environment. The Sage stands above forms and moreover no form as such is perfect; one cannot, therefore, measure wisdom according to the mental forms which it assumes. Whether one says "Who am I?" or "What am I?" is a matter of indifference, only the meaning is important.

We venture to hope, in any case, that there does not exist in India a *Guru* who believes himself superior to the Buddha, the Christ or the Prophet. The extrinsic proof of their identity with the Self resides not only in their own affirmations and in the existence of spiritual ways which derive from them, but also in the possibility of invoking the redemptive Name of the *Avatāra*. Thus, the fact that one can attain Deliverance by invoking Śrī Rāma, proves the perfection of his Wisdom; the *Avatāric* Name, whether isolated, or included in a formula, is the immediate vehicle of the eternal *Sadguru*.

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It is clear that, compared with the Truth, theory amounts to nothing; but in order to be able to say this one must take one's stand above theory, and not below it. For one who is not even capable of understanding it, theory will be his immediate need; it is theory which for him will represent the Self. If such a one presumes to scorn theory and to concern himself only with realization he will be wasting his time. Only he who understands the doctrine can know that in the face of Reality it also counts for nothing.

If, as some maintain, the Self is so easily understood, how is it that It is not understood by all men? If on the other hand It is hard to understand, then it follows that one must possess in the first place rare intellectual and human qualifications in order to conceive of It, not to mention realizing It, and secondly one must have doctrines in order to express It, if not to explain It, which may take on forms both subtle and complex, as well as apparently simple ones.

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In conclusion, we are minded to add a few further remarks about the spiritual uses of Invocation, *japa*, as found in the great traditions practically without exception. Persons affected with intellectual pretensions have been prone to look down upon those who follow this method, whether in India or elsewhere, describing it as only suitable for the spiritually immature. This opinion, based as it is upon a complete failure to understand either the operative principle behind *japa* or the "technical" conditions governing its use at various degrees, is in its way rather characteristic of certain mentalities and will therefore provide a fitting conclusion to the present discussion; besides which the subject is of great importance in itself, since it relates to a spiritual means particularly related, as all the traditions agree, to the conditions of humanity in the latter days of the cycle.

How can one deny that the practice of *japa*, when it is accompanied by appropriate meditation, is able to bring about Self-realization, in view of the fact that the *Mānava-Dharma-Śāstra*, the books of *Yoga* and other sacred texts bear witness to it? In order to understand that *japa* is not by definition a *bhaktic* method only (contrary to what certain people affirm) and that it can constitute an aid to the realization of Reality, one must understand that the divine Name does not refer by definition to an "objective God", but that it objectivates and actualises the Self, exactly like the *Sadguru*, and that it is thus

an embodiment of the Absolute; in Sūfism, the divine Name (*Allāh*) corresponds exactly to the *Pranava Om* with its *mātrās*. *Japa* is not properly speaking a rite, otherwise the sacred texts would not say that for him who practises *japa* rites are no longer required. A rite is an act having a purificatory or sacrificial purpose; a Brāhmin could be, so to speak, crushed beneath an accumulation of rites; when it is said that rites cannot deliver from ignorance, it is evidently these sacrificial and purificatory rites which are in question, and not methodical invocation which even renders an elaborate ritualism impossible. *Japa* cannot be opposed to Knowledge—which alone delivers—because it is a relative support of it; apart from the fact that the divine Name “incarnates” the divine “Ego”, absolute and infinite, of which it provides us *a priori* with the virtuality, it removes *a fortiori* all such obstacles as are opposed to Knowledge, that is to say such obstacles as separate us in illusory fashion from That which we have in reality never ceased to be—That which we are. If Śrī Śaṅkara says that Knowledge is the only direct means of obtaining Liberation, this indicates implicitly that there are other means, indirect no doubt, but none the less efficacious. For us human beings Knowledge always presents itself, at least *a priori*, in association with a support which is its vehicle; such a support can never be contrary to its own end. If the *japa* of a *jñānin* who has already obtained *tatvōpadeśa* constitutes an aid to preserving what has been assimilated spiritually, this also proves that *japa* is in no way opposed to Knowledge, no more than the respiration with which *japa* moreover must eventually become merged. It is clearly evident that, after a certain stage, the “materiality” of the divine Name becomes secondary; but this likewise implies no condemnation of *japa*, quite the contrary. The *jñānic japa*, as practised in certain Islāmic religious orders, is accompanied by meditations on unreality and Reality, and after that by pure and unitive contemplation, which means

that in Sūfism, as in *Vedānta*, it is Knowledge which always and alone delivers.

Śrī Śaṅkarācārya says in his hymns: "I do not ask of Thee, O Mother! riches, good fortune, or salvation; I seek no happiness, no knowledge. This is my only prayer to Thee: that, as the breath of life forsakes me, still I may chant Thy holy Name." And also: "If one who feeds on the flesh of dogs can learn to speak with honeyed words, a beggar gain uncounted wealth and so live long and fearlessly, simply from hearing Thy magic Name, who can describe what must befall one who repeats it day and night?" And again: "Chanting *Brahman*, the Word of Redemption, meditating *Aham Brahmāsmi*, living on alms and wandering freely, blest indeed is the wearer of the loin-cloth." And finally: "Control the soul, restrain the breath, sift out the transient from the True; repeat the holy Name of God, and quieten the restless mind within; to this, the universal rule, apply yourself with heart and soul."



## CHAPTER IV

### A VIEW OF YOGA

YOGA is the most direct and also the most ample manifestation possible of a spiritual principle which, as such, must be able to reveal itself whenever the nature of things permits or demands it: this principle is essentially that of a "technique"—or an "alchemy"—designed to open the human microcosm to the divine influx. *Yoga* itself is defined as a "halting of the activities of the mental substance", and, strictly speaking, there is only one *Yoga*—the art of perfect concentration, of which *Hatha-Yoga* and *Raja-Yoga* are the two essential forms, and of which the other *Yogas* (e.g. *Laya* and *Mantra*) are special modalities or developments. It is true that the word *Yoga* also designates—in virtue of its literal sense of "Union"—the three great paths of "gnosis" (*jñāna*), "love" (*bhakti*) and "action" (*karma*); but the connection with the principle that characterizes the yogic art is then much less direct. *Yoga*, as defined in the *Sūtras* of Patañjali and related works, is always the interior alchemy, or the assemblage of technical means for realizing—with the aid of intellectual, corporeal, moral and sometimes emotional elements—"union" through "ecstasy" or *samādhi*.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The word "ecstasy" can include several meanings, depending on the mode or degree of "rapture"; but in every case it indicates a "departure" from terrestrial consciousness, whether this departure is active or passive in character, or rather, whatever may be the combination of these two characteristics.

The following example will serve to clarify the distinction just established—though admittedly too schematic it is none the less instructive: with *jñāna*, “humility” is awareness of the nothingness of the *ego* considered from the standpoint of its relativity; with *bhakti*, humility is self-abasement before the beauty of the Beloved everywhere present, the annihilation of self before the Divine Glory; with *karma*, the same virtue becomes the disinterested service of one’s neighbour, the humiliation of self for the sake of God; but from a strictly yogic point of view, this same virtue will be in a way “geometrical” or “physical”; it will appear as a “levelling” of the activities of the animic substance, abstention from all mental affirmation.

The fact that the possibility of a “spiritual technique” results, not from a human willing, but from the nature of things, replies in advance to the objection (an all too human objection!) that *Yoga* is something useless, or even “artificial”<sup>1</sup>, and contrary to the true love of God. In reality, the yogic principle has its foundation in the cosmological aspect of man, an aspect that implies the possibility of applying to the microcosm disciplines which are “quasi-geometrical” and consequently as foreign to the circuitous ways of reasoning as to the impulses of sentiment; that is to say, these disciplines have a character that is purely “physical”, using this term according to its primitive sense as applying to the whole realm of “concordant actions and reactions,” hence to all that is subject to the “impersonal” laws and forces of the cosmos. On the other hand, when viewed according to a more profound perspective, the yogic principle is based on the idea that man is as though steeped in the Infinite: his essence—that by which he exists and knows—is “not other than” infinite, just as a piece of ice is

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<sup>1</sup> It is too easily forgotten that judged by such standards all sacraments and other rites would be “artificial”, since their validity does not depend upon the mental or moral effort of the officiant.

not other than the water in which it floats; man is "Infinity congealed"—if one can express oneself thus. It is our hardness alone, the opacity of our fallen condition, that renders us impermeable to the pre-existing Grace; the practice of *Yoga* is the art of opening—on the basis of our cosmic structure—our encrustedness to the Light which infinitely "surrounds" us. It will doubtless be objected that no "technique" could suffice in itself, that "physical" means could never alone and unaided permit man to get beyond his own limits, that man is not simply a bundle of impersonal factors but also an intelligence and a will, therefore a living *ego*; all this is evident enough, but it is precisely for this reason that yogic disciplines are always accompanied with intellectual and moral elements, elements of contemplation and virtue. *Yoga* does not "produce" sanctity; when reduced to its characteristic principle, it appears after all as a negative activity, comparable, say the Hindus, to the breaching of a dyke: this operation, without producing anything by itself, permits water to flood a field. Only intellection—or love—can realize union positively, with God's help, in one degree or another as belongs to them respectively.

The "technical" or "impersonal" character of yogic science links it to gnosis rather than to love, somewhat as the "subjective" character of musical emotion links it to the way of love rather than to that of gnosis.<sup>1</sup>

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Semitic and European minds show a tendency towards irreducible alternatives, whereas the Hindu mind works

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<sup>1</sup> Christian mysticism comprises diverse modalities in time and space: there is in early Christianity, as in Islam, a distinction between "love" and "gnosis", but this distinction is not as systematic as in Hinduism. Christian *bhakti* stands apart from all gnosis and rests on the dogmas alone, while Christian *jñāna*, the gnosis of the Fathers of which the last echoes are to be found among the Rhenish mystics, always includes—as with the Sūfis—an element of love.

naturally by integrations and syntheses. It is difficult for a Westerner to reconcile the idea of a "spiritual technique" with an attitude of piety and virtue; this mixing of "coldness" and "warmth" seems to him to lack cohesion, sincerity and beauty; positions which are complementary seem to him to stand in irreducible opposition, whereas a Hindu without difficulty reconciles the apparent antagonisms, which he regards as poles of one and the same fundamental intention; he even goes so far as to consider his own fervour in an entirely objective manner, changing perspective in accordance with what is spiritually opportune. The European sees himself, practically speaking, before the following alternative: either he believes in piety, virtue, duty, moral beauty and the free gift of grace, in which case he will be prone to scorn the "technical" point of view and see in it nothing but "fakirism"; or else, reacting against religious sentimentalism, he opts for the yogic point of view (whether rightly or wrongly is not in question here), in which case he will tend to despise, or at least to undervalue, piety and virtue and to uphold the "amoral" side of *Yoga*<sup>1</sup>; such a reaction, it must be said, is often sentimental in its own way, but in a "frigid" manner, and in that case we would without hesitation prefer pious sentimentality, which at least is what it purports to be.

Christianity is in its general structure a way of love; therefore the yogic element, which by its "objectivity" is related to gnosis, does not appear in the foreground; one meets it in the Hesychast tradition—which includes aspects of gnosis from the very fact of its strict dependence on the Greek Fathers—and also, under a different form, in the mysticism of

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<sup>1</sup> This impersonal and amoral—not "immoral"—character attaching to any strictly technical point of view does not prevent *Yoga* from being accompanied in fact by moral rules, nor does it preclude it from allying itself sometimes with sentimental attitudes as the case of *bhakti* proves; but it is not these associations that have tended to attract Westerners to the practices of *Yoga*.

St. John of the Cross. Doubtless it could be pointed out here—apart from any question of gnosis—that the love of God is by definition unsentimental, that it is above all the act of will that “opts for God”, and that “willing” is not synonymous with “emotivity”: this is true when will depends on Knowing, but when such is not the case then will must inevitably ally itself with feeling, since a way of pure willing is inconceivable, will depending always upon some factor that is either cognitive or emotive.

But, it will be argued, is not Hindu *bhakti* also a more or less emotive spirituality—and therefore after all passionate? Our answer here is that one must take into account the “spiritual temperament” of the Hindus, their contemplative plasticity, the particular character of their emotivity, which is more “cosmic” and less individualistic than that of Europeans, as well as more “aesthetic” and less prone to moralizing. Furthermore, the Hindu, though he is a powerful logician, is little given to rationalism, a fact that must not be regarded as paradoxical, because he is above all an intuitive type whose intelligence is open to the essences of things; he does not feed, like the Westerner, upon conceptual, not to say, rational alternatives; metaphysical ideas, far from forming for him a more or less inoperative background, on the contrary intervene actively in his methods, even though their influence is doubtless less direct with the *bhakta* than with the *jñāni* <sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> It goes without saying that it is the traditionally minded Hindu we have in mind, and not one whose hereditary dispositions have deviated in an anti-traditional direction, to the point of proving that “*corruptio optimi pessima*”. Hinduism, strictly speaking, has no “dogmas” in the sense that every concept may be denied, on condition that the argument used is intrinsically true; which amounts to saying that concepts can be denied from the standpoint of a higher level of truth, metaphysic standing above cosmology and realization above theory as such. However, on their own level, the scriptural symbols of Hinduism are just as immovable as the Semitic dogmas, and this excludes any fallacious comparison of Hindu doctrine with the opinions of philosophers. No orthodox Hindu can maintain that the *Veda* has been mistaken on any point whatsoever.

Aesthetic factors (giving this expression its most profound meaning) hold nearly the same importance in Hindu *bhakti* as intellectual factors; the same can be said of the *mahabbah* of Sūfism, as represented by Omar Ibn El-Faridh, for example, or Jalal ad-Din Rumi. A European of Latin formation tends primarily to see in beauty as such passional attraction, "seduction", or "the world"; in general he lacks the intuition of essences, the spontaneous sense for universal analogies and cosmic rhythms; he is given to replacing contemplative aestheticism by an ascetical form of sentimentality; he does not fall into ecstasy, like Rāmākṛishna, before some beauty of nature, or rather, before the celestial beauty therein reflected; it is rare for him to look on nature with the eyes of a St. Francis of Assisi. Music for a Westerner is indeed a "sensible consolation", but it rarely amounts to more than that; he does not readily hear in it "the sound of the gates of Paradise opening and closing", according to an expression of the Mawlawi Dervishes<sup>1</sup>; he knows not the sacred dance, although St. Teresa of Avila had a presentiment of it and would certainly have appreciated its value. The Westerner distinguishes above all between "worldly" or "immoral" beauty and beauty that has a religious content—but on the other hand, since natural beauty binds him to passion instead of raising him towards the Infinite, he comes to identify passion with the beautiful, whence the loss of sacred art<sup>2</sup>. It is easy to

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<sup>1</sup> "We have heard these sounds in Paradise," says Jalal ad-Din Rumi, "and although earth and water have thrown over us their veil, we retain dim memories of these celestial chants. . . . Music is the food of those who love, for it recalls to them their primordial union with God."

<sup>2</sup> In the Middle Ages, the Eastern genius of Byzantium and the Nordic genius of the Celts and Germans contributed together to the flowering of Christian art; in the Renaissance the passional aspect of the artistic impulsion killed the spiritual aspect of art; but as passional art wished in its turn to become religious, it sank fatally into a pompous hypocrisy and an empty aesthetical formalism. For the men of the Renaissance, beauty was made up of sensuality and rationalism; the former dominated architecture and the latter the plastic arts.

understand why the *samkīrtanas* of the Hindu *bhaktas* or the "spiritual concerts" of the Sūfis often appear to the Christian as a facile playing with emotion, and in point of fact a fluctuation between the intuition of the heart and natural emotion does exist, so much so that certain Sūfis were opposed to the extension of these practices. Howbeit, the spiritual efficacy of aesthetic supports is in the nature of things; therefore it must actualise itself under certain conditions and it is unreasonable to deny this because of some personal preconception. From the yogic point of view everything capable of promoting concentration is by that fact serviceable, at least in principle; the criterion of efficacy—apart from the intrinsic value of beauty—is therefore to be found in the unifying power of the aesthetic experience.

In order to clarify still further the difference between the Hindu and European mentalities, we can say this: the Christian, like every Monotheist—save in gnosis—finds himself poised intellectually between dogma and reason, whence the "obscurity of faith"; he is, as it were, suspended between divine mystery and human incapacity; intellection—supra-rational intuition—is then replaced by the element of "consolation", an extremely complex factor which can be sentimental, but is not necessarily so. Such "consolation" is to be met with in all spirituality, Eastern as well as Western, for the simple reason that it answers to a general possibility of the human soul; what is peculiar to Catholic mysticism is not the existence there of consolations but the absence of analogous factors of another order and of an active nature. This restriction is not unrelated to a certain practical concern for collective expediency, for formal cohesion and apologetic convenience, or, in other words, to a tendency to reduce the mystical life to a single easily controllable type. It goes without saying that such reservations never apply to sanctity, which by definition is a perfection, as proved by the graces

included in it; with a saint, even specific limitations are transmuted into glories, if one may so express oneself; nevertheless, spirituality contains many different modes, each one of which has the right to exist and which our reverence for some particular saintly type does not authorise us to misconstrue.

The problem of faith and consolation brings us to that of "temptations against faith": these are possible because faith is situated in the will and not in the intellect. Faith is a matter of grace, of will and of reason, at least in that perspective of love whereby Christian spirituality is determined in a quasi-exclusive manner; it has an aspect of "obscurity" which calls forth temptations, rather as the fallibility of reason calls forth errors, or as liberty in regard to evil calls forth sins. However, even when one takes faith in its ancient and integral sense, as also, or even especially, including gnosis, temptations none the less remain possible, but then they alter their characters: the rift between dogma and our strength of intuitive adhesion is then replaced by the rift between intellectual certitude and human weakness, or rather it is the acute actualisation of this rift that constitutes the trial. Christ's cry "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani*" is the prefiguration of the mystical temptations against faith: just as the Christ is overwhelmed for an instant by the human obscurity He wills to taste in order that it may be vanquishable by man, so is the love of the mystic invaded by the obscurities of his own soul which the devils moreover have every interest in exploiting.<sup>1</sup> Contrary to what takes place with Christ, who embraces the entire cosmos, the mystic suffers only on his own account, unless he also, out of charity, expiates an obscurity foreign to himself; such a human expiation will, moreover, necessarily remain incomplete.

A mysticism that is passional, and fraught with suffering by reason of this very character, will readily see in the yogic

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<sup>1</sup> The Sūfis regard doubt concerning the truth of the divine Unity as one of the temptations that can affect beginners in their retreats.



technique a pretentious and facile attempt to short-circuit stages and avoid suffering<sup>1</sup>; from the standpoint of *Yoga*, on the other hand, as from the standpoint of pure gnosis, it is precisely the passional character of the mysticism of love which can take on an appearance of "facility", though not in a blameworthy sense; "difficulty" will then reside not in suffering, but on the contrary in detachment and in a serenity which turns away from the passional and therefore "easy" movements of the soul; the "difficulty" in gnosis is subtle and qualitative, not dramatic. There is nothing individualistic about *Yoga*; it treats the "plastic matter" of the soul with a logic that is wholly impersonal.

In passional mysticism the negative character of the ascetic action of the will is compensated by sentimentality which, in so far as it is a human fact, is positive for man in the sense that it is not opposed to his nature, indeed quite the contrary; on the other hand, the passional and non-intellectual character of this volitional action is compensated by the ascetic tendency within sentimentality itself. As for intellectual asceticism, it is neutral and serene; not penitential, but purificatory: it does not derive from regret for a sin; it is content to correct an error, since it is able to do so and in the measure that it is so able.

Gnosis requires an impassivity based on truth, on the Immutable, not a suffering offered for the sake of love; we say it does not "require" it, not that it cannot "admit" it, since by definition it admits all that is true on any showing whatsoever. For gnosis the emotive factor is not a utilisable key, except on the aesthetic plane where, however, this factor is compensated by the intellectual aspect of beauty; one almost feels tempted to say that the *jñāni* is forever condemned to

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<sup>1</sup> This reproach of "facility" has often been formulated—and with what facility!—on the subject of the "Prayer of Jesus", as if Christ had never said, "My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

serenity. He cannot remain closed to sweetnesses that are in the nature of things and are offered him by God when in contemplation, but his point of departure could not be a passion for God; his nature is impregnated with contemplation and truth; it is fundamentally static; he follows his own immediate essence though he must necessarily integrate in his spiritual way all the tendencies belonging to human nature. This aspect of serenity, of profound peace, of "holy silence", is like the boundary stone marking the threshold of gnosis, but at the same time it belongs to its essence. It is the air gnosis breathes and lives by; we are here referring to gnosis as such, though without losing sight of the fact that it can enter into combinations with other ways, and that differences here can never be treated as absolute.

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Before proceeding further, a small digression is necessary. It was stated above that the Monotheist finds himself intellectually poised between dogma and reason; now the fact that the "Semitic" perspectives are similar, not only by reason of the monotheistic idea but also by reason of dogmatism as such, does not imply that their points of departure are always alike, for were this so their diversity would lack justification. In fact, where Christianity puts the question: "What is the state of man?" Islam for its part asks "What is man?"—that is to say, in its implied definition of man, Islam always takes account of the fact that man is not only an individual being but also a collective one: social morality is not merely a "multiplication" of a spiritual discipline addressed to the individual as such, because it is concerned with a new being, distinct from the individual, namely the collectivity, which possesses no ego and obeys its own natural laws, whether these please us or not; this it is which confers on social morality its character of a compromise, a "canalisation" of evil; this is something which neither Christianity nor Buddhism has been

able to avoid, even though both these traditions are founded on an exclusively spiritual morality, one therefore which is addressed to the human person alone. That which is collectively—socially or politically—unavoidable, could not *ipso facto* sully the individual, nor could it bind him in an absolute way; conversely, that which sullies the individual could not be required by a traditional morality.

These considerations have led us somewhat outside our subject, but nevertheless we wish to take this opportunity to explain the following point: Muslim morality—apart from its interiorisation or sublimation in the Sūfi tradition—derives, so to speak, from an intelligence that observes natural laws and not from a will that aspires to a certain ascetico-mystical ideal; the common law comprises a “realistic” morality of rational, and not an “idealistic” morality of sentimental, appearance; when we say that this morality derives from an intelligence that observes and that its appearance is rational we are not intending to deny its character of revelation, but only to define its species. It cannot be said too often that in Islam, as also in the tradition of Abraham, man is intelligence, that is to say spirit “essentially” centred on the Absolute but “accidentally” diverted from its normal focus of attention and, as a result, become “polytheistic” and “idolatrous”; whereas in Christianity man is *a priori* regarded as being the will, therefore also the fall, nature corrupted and passionate, sin.<sup>1</sup>

From the above there result the following positions: in Christianity intelligence is conceived, generally speaking, as something delimited and regulated, whereas the will has before it a field of action that is limitless in the direction of God; in Islam, on the contrary, it is the will that is delimited

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<sup>1</sup> Buddhism in a way combines both perspectives—the Christian and the Abrahamic—but in a context, of course, that is alien to the religions called “monotheistic”.

and regulated—in a manner that is just as approximate but none the less fundamental—while it is intelligence that is limitless in the direction of God, that is to say, it is through intelligence that the interior transmutation is operated. Christianity asks nothing else of intelligence than submissiveness towards the mysteries and help in settling any doubts that might arise, in order that the will may be free to hasten towards the divine Love; while Islam only asks of the will that it should submit to the religious ordinances and show zeal in this obedience, in order that intelligence may be left quite free to contemplate the profound mystery of the divine Unity.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand we have a sacrifice that finally reaches beyond itself till it merges in the supernatural, and on the other we have intellection becoming ever more concrete, ontological and hyper-ontological, to the point of losing the human subject on the way; from a more external standpoint it might be added that the Muslim spirit has in it something of a blend of violence and serenity, just as the Christian spirit has in it a blend of sentimentality and heroism.<sup>2</sup>

All this allows one to perceive why Islam accepts without difficulty the idea of a spiritual “technique”; the oft decried practices of the dervishes provide abundant evidence of this, but that does not prevent Islam from remaining a Semitic monotheism like its two sister religions so that, from that very fact, the question it first thinks of answering takes the form of “what do I believe?” where a Hindu would rather ask “what

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<sup>1</sup> The same remark applies to Judaism, with the difference, however, that in that tradition its esotericism has a much more sybilline character by reason of the great accentuation of exotericism, as required by the very idea of the “chosen people”.

<sup>2</sup> When two neighbouring yet so opposed perspectives are compared it is good to recall the Far Eastern symbol of the *yin-yang* of which the white half contains a black spot and the black half a white spot. This gives the very image of the law of compensation or, theologically speaking, of the “communication of idioms”. A traditional perspective never forms an enclosed system.

do I not believe?" The Hindu spirit is "being" before it is "thinking".

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We have tried to examine the reasons for the incompatibility that the majority of Europeans believe to exist between "virtue"—which attracts grace but does not create it—and "technique" which in their opinion seems to wish to appropriate grace artificially and in a spirit of presumptuous facility. No doubt the best way to show the perfect compatibility between these two principles is to define each of them as concretely as possible.

Virtue consists essentially in "humility" and "charity"; these are the fundamental qualities of virtue from which all others derive, to which they all relate and without which no sanctity is possible.<sup>1</sup> Humility presents itself under two aspects: awareness of one's own nothingness metaphysically in the face of the Absolute and awareness of one's personal imperfection; this second humility implies not only a relentless instinct for detecting one's own limitations and weaknesses, but also a simultaneous capacity to discern the positive qualities in one's neighbour, for a virtue which is blind to virtue in others becomes self-destructive. Consciousness of one's individual insufficiency springs from the necessarily fragmentary

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<sup>1</sup> If the fundamental virtues are everywhere the same by reason of the unity of human nature, terminologies can vary greatly, because of a shift of emphasis according to differing mentalities. Thus, the Muslims prefer to lay stress on "poverty" (*faqr*) rather than on humility (*khushu*, *tadarra* or *towadu* according to the shade of meaning intended), humility being considered to be a mode of poverty. In place of "charity" they will rather speak of "generosity" (*karam*) and "nobility" (*sharaf*), but they also tend to give much more importance to "sincerity" (*ikhlas*) and "truthfulness" (*sidq*) because these both imply the charitable virtues, whereas the contrary does not hold good in equal degree. The Muslim outlook stresses the aesthetic side of the virtues, rather than their sacrificial side as does the Christian outlook. Let us add that in Islam the origin of all sin is attributed not only to pride (of Satan refusing to do obeisance to Adam) but also to envy (of Cain killing Abel), both of these attitudes being contrary to "poverty" by reason of their pretension.

character of the *ego*; in other words, to speak of the *ego* is to speak of partial imperfection in regard to other individuals. Humility is moreover owed to all creatures, since each and all of them manifest qualities and glorify God after their manner; the first relation goes from God to the thing, and the second from the thing to God; man has no right to the things of creation except on condition that he respects them, that is to say on condition that he discerns in each one both its divine property and its spiritual language; man never has a right to destroy simply for a whim of destructiveness. Among virtues the position of humility is a special one—like that of the apex in a triangle—because it conforms to God, not by “participation” but by “opposition”, in the sense that the attitude of humility, poverty or self-effacement is analogically opposed to the divine Majesty; this opposition is however a relative one, since it rejoins the direct analogy through its intrinsic perfection which is, *mutatis mutandis*, the simplicity of the Essence. Humility, therefore, is distinguishable from the other virtues by the fact that it marks a relatively indirect participation in the divine Prototype, or in other words by the fact that it is, according to differing points of view, either “more” or “less” than the other fundamental virtues.

As for charity, this consists in abolishing the egocentric distinction between “me” and “other”: it is seeing the “I” in “other” and “other” in “I”. Humility and charity are the twin dimensions of self-effacement: they are, to use a Christian symbolism, like the vertical and horizontal branches of the Cross. The one can always be reduced to the other: humility is always to be found in charity, and *vice versa*. To these two virtues must be added the virtue of truthfulness: in other words love of truth, objectivity, impartiality; it is a virtue that situates intelligence in the framework of the will<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This feature truthfulness shares with faith, with the difference, however, that truth is “supernatural” for faith, though it can present any

—in such measure as the nature of things allows of this or demands it—and its function consists in keeping away every passional element from the intelligence. Discernment must remain independent of love or hate: it must see things as they are, firstly according to universal Truth which assigns to each thing its degree in the hierarchy of values, and secondly according to the truth proper to things in their immediate nature; when the alternative presents itself, preference must be given to essential aspects, for which accidental aspects must not be substituted, and so forth. This serenity and this precision exclude neither love nor holy indignation, because these arise parallel to intellection and not within it: holy indignation, far from being opposed to truth derives from truth as from its enabling cause. Truthfulness corrects any arbitrariness that might result from a humility or charity regarded in too subjective a way: it prevents humility from becoming an end in itself and thus sinning against intelligence and the nature of things; it likewise controls charity and determines its various modes. One has to be humble because the *ego* tends to think itself more than it is; one has to be charitable because the *ego* tends to love only itself; and one has to be truthful because the *ego* tends to prefer its own tastes and habits to the truth.

Even at a purely intellectual level humility and charity are in fact<sup>1</sup> far from being superfluous, since the support of

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kind of nature in truthfulness. In common language, truthfulness sometimes becomes the fact of always speaking the truth but this definition is insufficient on the spiritual plane, firstly because every morality allows or even requires—according to the case—lying in case of necessity or “pious lying”, and secondly because mere frankness does not in itself imply any objectivity of judgment, and lastly because virtue does not necessarily exclude error.

<sup>1</sup> In the Christian perspective, truthfulness is found included in humility, which excludes prejudice, and in charity which excludes falsehood; in the Islamic perspective it is on the contrary truthfulness or sincerity that includes the other two virtues. These examples show that truthfulness is not of the same order as the more specifically volitional virtues.

intellection is the human individual, who is not himself pure light; a contemplative mind, be it even one of prodigious acuteness, if it neglects these interior and essential virtues even out of simple forgetfulness, is not sheltered from error, at least on the plane of certain relativities, though it may be so sheltered on the plane of principles or in the setting of such infallibility as is safeguarded by conditions deriving from tradition. Certainly, the intellect implies and guarantees the fundamental virtues in proportion to its own "actualness", for which reason it is contradictory to attribute to a high metaphysical intelligence pride or egotism in the full and crude sense of those words; but there is almost always, as between intellect and the man, a sufficient margin of difference to justify a conscious effort towards moral perfection, for truth, like all noble things, has its own demands to make. Man can do nothing without God; now virtue is to attempt nothing without God.<sup>1</sup>

What was said before about the indeterminate character of the will applies likewise to the virtues: when these are not determined by a knowledge, an awareness of the nature of things, or, to be more exact, by an intuition of the divine qualities from which those things derive<sup>2</sup>, the virtues (with the exception of truthfulness) will inescapably be nourished on

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<sup>1</sup> St. Therese of Lisieux saw this clearly in her own manner: ". . . it would mean relying on my own strength, and when one is there, one risks slipping into the abyss. . . . I well understand how St. Peter fell . . . he leaned on himself instead of leaning on the good God."

(*Counsels and Memories*)

<sup>2</sup> God is not "humble" like man, because He could not abase Himself before someone external and superior to Himself, for such a one does not exist. The "humility" of God, as we have said, is the simplicity of his essence, for He is without parts. There is, however, another aspect of the "divine humility", one that is both intrinsic and anthropomorphic:

"When the servant takes one step towards his Lord the Lord gets up from his throne and takes one hundred steps to meet his servant" (*Hadith* of the Prophet). As for man, he is not a pure essence, but a mixture of spirit and earth; therefore he cannot in himself be "good".



sentimentality, a fact that too often gives rise to a distressing confusion between virtue and feeling; and, what is more, neither must one confuse a virtuous sentiment with a sentimental virtue.

Virtues in their own way delineate the truth; we have to "know" with all our being and not with intelligence alone; spiritual sincerity—or knowledge in its wholeness—demands something from us which, apart from all question of doctrinal or ritual form, comes entirely from ourselves, at least as regards the effort; for virtue in itself, in its ultimate content, could not come from the Infinite. To be virtuous is to be perfectly oneself, it is to hark back to our primordial memory, our ontological reality; without virtue all is either dispersed or else petrified; all becomes sterile. Virtue is the presence of the divine Being in the will and in feeling just as beauty is the presence of the Divine in a form. The soul belongs to the formal order: therefore it cannot participate in truth without beauty, it can only know completely with the assistance of its own proper beauty, namely, the virtue that ignores itself, that is to say that does not attribute itself to "me".<sup>1</sup> In other words, the direct and positive manifestation of truth requires a framework that corresponds to it qualitatively: "intellectual reality" has need of "existential truth" and essentially this is manifested as harmony of "proportions" and "rhythms"; in the microcosm as in the macrocosm the "Christic" mystery implies the "Marial" mystery. Water only reflects the moon when it is calm, and this calm, this bringing back of all discontinuous crispations into balance, is nothing other than beauty or virtue.

According to the point of view from which it is regarded, every virtue includes in a certain manner the other virtues; each one is a point of departure, and at the same time a

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<sup>1</sup> But not a virtue of which one has no awareness.

virtual totality. On the other hand, the three chief virtues duplicate themselves when one distinguishes, in each of them, a relation with God and a relation with man; in that case there is question either of major or supernatural virtues or else of minor or natural ones, the latter being strictly subordinate to the former. That virtue is "supernatural" which requires a grace; thus modesty is natural, whereas a consistent and entire humility towards God does not go without divine aid, that is to say without a divine act within us.

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Having described the element "virtue" in its broad lines, we must now attempt to define the element that is in a sense complementary to it, namely spiritual "technique", in order to demonstrate the perfect compatibility of these two elements in the spiritual life. Previously we have seen that "spiritual technique" is essentially the art of concentration; now if the mind could be continually fixed upon the Absolute, "like oil flowing from a pot" as a Hindu text puts it, it would by that very fact be in an uninterrupted state of sanctity, first in a passive way doubtless—passive but none the less salutary—and then also necessarily in an active way. The fallen soul is like an untamed animal, all its tendencies are "centrifugal"; if it be true that virtue indirectly favours concentration, the latter in its turn favours virtue, by reason of the analogy between "the centre" and "quality"; one could also say that the yogic aspect of virtue is our own effort by which existential vice is laid open to the divine Virtue, while the virtuous aspect of *Yoga* is purity of intention. Concentration needs to be learned like any other art, such as the handling of a musical instrument or a sword; the soul, if it is to be transformed by the beauty that is virtue—a beauty inconceivable outside truth, of which it is an expression—has also for its part everything to gain by becoming supple in its "physical" substance through transformation of its very existential foundation;

it is not enough for a viol to be well played, its wood must also be of noble quality. The yogic art, like every lawful thing, draws its justification from its spiritual possibility; it is enough to understand the latter in order to admit the former.

Strictly speaking, pure concentration is less a fixing of the mind upon an idea or an object than the elimination of every distraction; the divine presence, or grace if one so prefers, or intellect according to the point of view, must be allowed to act without hindrance, like a leaven; but concentration as such could not draw these out of nothing. As we have already made apparent, the virtues concern the "content" of the soul and yogic practices the "container".

It is possible to conceive of virtue without technique but not a spiritual technique without virtue, for virtue imposes itself on all, whereas the former is a matter of vocation.

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The question of grace is inseparable from what we have just been considering. In spirituality three aspects are distinguishable, namely, "virtue", "art" and "grace". In virtue and art, man is active; before grace, he is passive or at least receptive. From the standpoint of virtue or merit, grace is free gift; from the standpoint of technique or art, grace is consequent on one's power of concentration (but only in a partial sense) in conformity with the law of causality; but even in this case grace still retains its "gratuitous" character, since it never has a positive human cause, its positive cause always coming from God. Herein lies the profound meaning of the free gift of Grace, for it is evident that this gratuitous imparting never signifies that God could be arbitrary or that grace might sometimes lack a sufficient cause. The cause of Grace can never be found on the side of man except in a quite negative and accidental manner, for man can do no more than get rid of obstacles veiling the pre-existing grace, the

immutable cause of which is the Infinite.<sup>1</sup> That is why *Yoga* is always referred back to *Īśvara*, God regarded as "Being"<sup>2</sup>; without the initial grace of *Īśvara*, *Yoga* itself would be inconceivable. In an analogous sense the Sūfis teach that the initiate can do nothing without the initial grace of *Allah* (*tawfiq*, help of God) and that the spiritual states (*ahwal*, plural of *hal*) cannot be "productions" of any human industriousness, though this does not mean that man cannot take measures to eliminate anything which might act as an obstacle to grace; indeed, if the powers of the lower and passional soul (*nafs*) are able to cause the disappearance of a state of light, the powers of the superior and spiritual soul (*ruh*) can in their turn cause the disappearance of the effects of the inferior powers, therefore of those things that oppose themselves to grace infinite in itself. Furthermore, the state of grace must be fixed in the soul through efforts that are at

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<sup>1</sup> Metaphysically speaking (if one excepts the ineffable essence of gnosis), there is question here of a "relative infinitude", since all comes to us from Being and Being is not the Infinite in the absolute sense; Being nevertheless is absolute in respect of the creature as such.

To state that the divine Person is limited would be, from a human point of view, worse than ill-sounding.

<sup>2</sup> If for the theology of the Christian Scholastics (but not for the Patristic and Eckhartian gnosis) God is identified with Being, this is because that theology always corresponds to a way of love, whereas the theology of St. Gregory Palamas, for instance, who teaches that God contains Being without being reducible to it, allows for the possibility of gnosis. The *bhaktic* ways of India likewise consider Being only, the personal Divinity, in conformity with their own finality, which is only surpassed in *jñāna*. *Yoga* in the strict sense refers to *Īśvara* or the "personal God", because it envisages Him in his relations with the human microcosm, which is in fact the field of activity of all "spiritual technique". According to a rather common error found in certain circles, people think they are dealing only with *bhakti* wherever they meet an emotional element and with *jñāna* where they find intellectual dissertations; in reality, the valid criteria are as follows:—where there is "ontologism" and "dualism" in a fundamental sense *bhakti* is in question, but where there is "superontologism" and "non-dualism" *jñāna* is to be found; thus Meister Eckhart goes beyond the *bhaktic* point of view because, for him, God is "Being above Being and superessential Negation" and because "there is in the soul something uncreated and uncreatable."

the same time intellectual, moral and technical, or rather it is the soul that must be fixed in the state of grace, such fixation being called by the Sūfis a "station" (*maqam*); but there are also graces or states (*ahwal*) which quite clearly are independent of effort and in which the aspect of gratuitousness is directly manifested. God possesses infinitely the perfections of liberty and necessity, and both these aspects must express themselves in grace; the first is to be found especially in relation with love and the second with gnosis.

It is important never to lose sight of the fact that there is no *Yoga* that presumptuously relies solely on its own resources, and that the most characteristic form of *Yoga*, namely the association of *Hatha-Yoga* and *Rāja-Yoga*, rests humbly at the feet of *Īśvara* and puts itself in the hands of God. This is because no "art", as we have said, any more than virtue or intellection, is possible without the grace of God. Virtue calls forth gratuitous grace—or grace in its manifestation as free gift—while spiritual art calls forth necessary grace, or rather the necessary manifestation of a grace in itself gratuitous; but the converse is equally true, though in an indirect way; virtue can, as a component of art, "provoke" a grace that will then appear like a consequence; these are imponderables such as a systematic presentation can barely touch on. Lastly, account must be taken of this: love, of which man is the subject, is at first separated from grace, whereas gnosis, the subject of which is essentially the divine Intellect, is by its very nature a vehicle of grace and is so in the very degree that gnosis, delivered from the passional bonds of a "hardened human heart", reveals itself simultaneously both as the "Knower" and the "Known".

Following an approximate, yet in many ways instructive, distinction one can say that, if the virtues are concerned in a certain manner with the "content" of knowledge or love, inasmuch as that content coincides analogically with the divine

qualities, the yogic art, for its part, is concerned with the "act" of knowing or loving, and so with the modalities of union. Virtue realizes in the human "subject" a conformity with the divine "Object"; spiritual art eliminates—or conjointly with knowledge contributes to eliminating—the human "objectivation" that veils the divine "Subject".

## CHAPTER V

### ORTHODOXY AND ORIGINALITY OF BUDDHISM

THE first question to be put, in regard to any doctrine or tradition, is that of its intrinsic orthodoxy, that is to say the question of knowing whether that tradition conforms, not necessarily to such and such a determinate orthodox traditional outlook, but to the Truth purely and simply. In the case of Buddhism one therefore does not have to ask whether its 'non-theism' (not its 'atheism') is reconcilable, in its expression, with the Semitic theism or any other, but solely whether that 'non-theism' expresses the Truth or a sufficient and effective aspect of that Truth—a Truth of which theism for its part represents another possible expression, opportune within that particular world of which it is a governing principle. To the above must be joined the fact that any particular perspective is usually to be found somewhere within the framework of the very tradition that in a more general way excludes it. Thus 'theism' is to be found in a certain sense within the framework of Buddhism, as for instance, under the form of Amidism,<sup>1</sup> and that despite the 'non-theistic' character of the tradition viewed as a whole; while that same 'non-theism' in its turn is to be found in the conception of the 'Impersonal Essence' of the Divinity as occurring in the monotheist esotericisms, in Sūfism for instance. From this

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<sup>1</sup> *Bhaktic* form of Buddhism much practised in Japan, of which the chief 'spiritual support' is *japa* of the formula "*Namo Amida Butsu*" (= *Namo Amitabha Buddha*).

we see that the 'frameworks' have nothing exclusive about them but that it is all a matter of emphasis or spiritual economy.

What has just been said means implicitly that Buddhism, inasmuch as it represents a characteristic perspective and independently of its various modes, is necessary. It cannot but be so, given that a non-anthropomorphic, 'impersonal' and 'static' consideration of the Infinite is a possibility; this perspective therefore had to manifest itself at a certain 'cyclic moment' and in a human environment that rendered it opportune, for where the receptacle is to be found, there also the content imposes itself. It has moreover sometimes been remarked that the perspective in question cannot be distinguished in any essential respect from certain given doctrines or spiritual ways of Hinduism; this is true in one sense and is all the more likely inasmuch as Hinduism is characterized by an uncommon wealth both of doctrines and methods; but it would be wrong to draw from this a conclusion that Buddhism does not constitute a spontaneous and independent reality just as in the case of the other great Revelations. Buddhism extracted, so to speak, the 'Yogic sap' of Hinduism—not as a borrowing, of course, but as a divinely inspired 'remanifestation' thereof—and it gave to this substance an expression that was simplified in certain respects but was also new and powerfully original. This is shown with shining clarity by Buddhist art, of which the prototypes doubtless are recognizable in the sacred art of India and in the yogic *āsanas* or again in Indian dancing which, for its part is like an intermediary between *yoga* and the statuary of the temples. Buddhist art (and we especially have in mind the images of the Buddha) seems to have extracted from Hindu art, not such and such a particular symbolism, but its contemplative essence. The plastic arts of India evolve, in a final analysis, round the human body in its postures of recollection; in



Buddhism the image of that body and face has become a symbol of extraordinary expressiveness and a means of Grace of incomparable power and nobility.<sup>1</sup> It is through this crystallization that what Buddhism contains of the absolute and therefore also of the universal is most vividly exteriorised.

From a doctrinal point of view the great originality of Buddhism, to which we have already alluded, lies in the fact that it considers the Divine, not in reference to its cosmic manifestations, not therefore as ontological Cause and anthropomorphic personification, but on the contrary in reference to its acosmic and impersonal character, therefore as supra-existential 'state', a state which will appear as Voidness, *śūnyata*, when seen from the point of view of the false plenitude of Existence, *saṃsāra*. This also carries with it a certain unconditional character of the divine goodness or rather of the *nirvāṇic* Grace, which projects itself as a myriad of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas into the Round of Transmigration even down to the hells and as far as to deliver sinners, not by reason of their merits—regarded as beside the question—but in spite of their demerits; faith in the boundless compassion of Buddha—Himself an illusory appearance of the blissful Voidness—is itself already a grace or a gift. To be saved is to come out of the infernal circle of 'concordant actions and reactions' and in this respect morality appears as a quite provisional and

<sup>1</sup> The genius of the yellow race has added to the Indian prototypes something not far short of a fresh spiritual dimension, not fresh from the point of view of their symbolism as such but from that of their expression. The image of the Buddha, after having passed through the Hellenistic aberration of Gandhara—providentially perhaps, since it was but a question of transmitting a few formal elements—found among the yellow peoples an expansion made up of depth and serenity that we would readily describe as supernatural; it is as if the 'soul' of Divinity, the *nirvāṇic* Beatitude, had made its home in the Symbol. The *Citrālakṣaṇa*, containing the Indo-Tibetan canon of pictorial art, attributes the origin of painting to the Buddha himself; tradition also speaks of a statue made of sandalwood that King Prasenajit of Sravasti (or Udayana of Kausambi) caused to be made even during the lifetime of the Buddha; the Greek images of Gandhara may possibly have been stylised copies of this statue:

often inoperative thing, as being something still involved in the indefinite chain of acts and the existential fruits of acts. Forms such as Amidism, already mentioned, and Zen<sup>1</sup> are especially prone to arouse a consciousness of the subtle relations, made up of imponderables and mysteries, that both separate and unite the world of transmigration and extinction, *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*.

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In order to understand Buddhism in all its extension and under its many aspects, it is important to distinguish, in the case of the Buddha Himself, between the doctrine and the being: the doctrine, which is the doctrine of suffering, of the way of salvation and of *nirvāṇa*, and the being, who is manifested pre-eminently in the visible form of the Buddha, a form that was subsequently to be crystallised in sacred images as also in the sermons at the end of the Buddha's earthly life, those on which is founded the *Mahāyāna*.

What we have called 'the being of the Buddha' refers to whatever that celestial Message contains of a compassionate and at the same time esoteric character; this feature is also to be found in Buddhism of the *Theravāda*, despite the fact that the latter has remained a stranger to the Mahāyānic *sūtras*; but more especially we are thinking here of the sacred image of the Buddha, the cult of which is widespread throughout the Buddhist lands, irrespective, moreover, of whatever accent may have been placed upon it by this or that local tradition.

From a purely logical standpoint, it might be argued that there is a contradiction between the fundamental teaching, which rejects every cult of the person of the Blessed One (the *Dhamma* alone being considered salutary), and all those other

<sup>1</sup> *Zen*, Japanese form of the word *dhyaṇa*, has given its name to a whole branch of Buddhism, which has been of great spiritual fertility both in China and Japan, and in which meditation is practised according to a method calculated to carry the *sādhaka* to a flash-point of Enlightenment by attacking the ratiocinative tendency in its very roots.

elements which, on the contrary, have crystallised around that person, His body and His name, elements of which the spiritual heritage dominates Northern Buddhism. However, each of these two viewpoints is equally legitimate in its own way; a relative opposition between two complementary dimensions of one and the same Truth is in the very nature of things, no less than the saving virtue of the instrument itself through which the Revelation operates. Something of the same kind is to be found in this saying of Christ: "It is good for you that I should depart", and in the fact that neither the Eucharistic Sacrifice nor the descent of the Holy Spirit would have been conceivable without the departure of Jesus. The differences of metaphysical perspective, of spiritual alchemy and of traditional structure that distinguish Christianity from Buddhism are certainly profound, but the same laws of spiritual economy do nonetheless manifest themselves in both cases and necessarily so, as indeed in all forms of the Spirit.

In order to understand the Buddha's teaching, it is necessary to keep track of the following: this perspective is founded *a priori* upon the concrete fact of general human experience, under its most immediate and most tangible aspect, coupled with a provisional setting aside of every element that does not enter in a direct manner into that experience; now the Buddha, as spokesman of that perspective—and by 'perspective' we mean something perfectly 'concrete' and in no wise a philosophical opinion—the Buddha could not exteriorise his own redemptive nature on the selfsame level as a Law which by the logic of things lays all the initiative of deliverance on man, although that redemptive nature is nevertheless evident enough; evident, because there must be a sufficient reason for the fact that it is He, Sākyamuni, and not one out of thousands of other men, who discovered the way out of the *kārmic* wheel of births and deaths—or rather that particular way out which is the specifically Buddhist way and

which alone is under discussion here; likewise there must be a sufficient reason for the fact that He alone "has broken existence like a breastplate"; this uniqueness of function or of miracle, which first of all effaced itself before the *Dhamma* as not being the content thereof, had in its turn to be affirmed in virtue of its own nature and its quality of celestial gift, and this was done, first in the form of the initiation of the *Sangha*<sup>1</sup> and secondly in the form of the final sermons.<sup>2</sup> These are sharply distinguishable from those of the Law; they reveal the metaphysic of the Void, which will presently take on a doctrinal aspect with Nāgārjuna and a purely 'experimental' aspect with the school of *Dhyāna* or *Zen*, of which Bodhidharma was the great initiator; the Sermon of the Flower is especially significant in this respect. Yet another expression of this profound aspect of the Buddha is the saving invocation of the Name of Amitābha and lastly, as we have said, the sacramental image of the Buddha, that true 'manifestation of the Void' (*Śūnyamūrti*) and 'expression of the Inexpressible'. All these elements derive from that aspect which we have called, in order to distinguish it from His general and more or less 'exterior' doctrine, the 'being' of the Buddha.

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In conclusion, we will quote a passage taken from the works of a great Japanese sage, Honen, in his *Summary of Nembutsu Doctrine*. This passage offers a fitting commentary upon the nature of the Buddhist tradition, under the double heading of Orthodoxy and Originality. This time, however, the first-named is envisaged not only in relation to Truth

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<sup>1</sup> This quite plainly indicates the possession of *avatāric* power.

<sup>2</sup> It must not be forgotten that some of these Scriptures belong, not only to the Mahāyāna, but also to Theravādic Buddhism. For us, these two main divisions of Buddhism—that of the 'North' and that of the 'South'—correspond to two orthodox perspectives issued from one and the same Revelation.

unqualified but also from the more special standpoint of its own internal consistency, that is to say, of the conformity of its various doctrines to the original message as delivered through the mouth of Sākyamuni Himself, the unique source whence they all ultimately derive and their common point of reference. A tendency of certain branches of the tradition to claim for themselves exclusive orthodoxy, such as Honen described, has again been much in evidence in recent times, especially where modernistic influences, Western in origin and character, have been powerful, to the point in some cases of quite losing sight of that variety in unity which is so characteristic of Buddhism—of Buddhist orthodoxy one might just as well have said, as also of Hindu orthodoxy. This variety in the expression of a selfsame basic Truth is in fact one of the principal ‘notes’ indicating, in Buddhism, its great originality. Put in more purely metaphysical terms, one could also say that the aspect of orthodoxy corresponds, at the traditional level, to the divine Necessity while that of originality, for its part, expresses the divine Freedom. Or, as one could also say, in any authentic tradition its orthodoxy is necessarily free and original, and likewise its originality remains orthodox both in spirit and form. In this respect Honen’s conclusions cannot be improved upon; we will give the quotation in full:

“Now we find in the many teachings the great Master (Buddha) himself promulgated during his life-time, all the principles for which the eight Buddhist sects, the esoteric and exoteric and the Greater and the Lesser Vehicles stand, as well as those elementary doctrines suited to the capacity of the immature, together with those intended for people able to grasp Reality itself. Since then there have been various expositions and commentaries on them such as we now have, with their multitude of diverse interpretations. Some expound the principle of the utter emptiness of things. Some bring us to the very heart of reality, while others set up the theory that

there are five fundamental distinctions in the natures of sentient beings, and still others reason that the Buddha-nature is found in them all. Every one of these sects claims that it has reached finality in its world view, and so they keep contending with one another, each persisting in saying that its own is the most profound view and is absolutely right. Now the fact is that what they all say is exactly what the Sūtras and Śāstras say, and corresponds to the golden words of Nyorai himself, who, according to men's varying capacity, taught them at one time one thing and at another time another, as circumstances required. So it is hard now to say which is profound and which is shallow, or to distinguish their comparative value, for they are all equally taught, and we must not go to either extreme in our interpretation. If we but attend to our religious practices as the Sūtras teach, they will all help us to pass safely over the sea of birth and death to the other shore. If we act according to the Law, we shall attain Enlightenment. Those who go on vainly disputing as to whether a colour has a light or dark shade, are like deaf men talking about the quality of a man's voice whether it is good or bad. The one thing to do is to put the principles into practice, because they all teach the way of deliverance from the dread bondage."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> From *Honen the Buddhist Saint, His Life and Teaching*. Translation by Rev. Harper Havelock Coates and Rev. Ishizuka; Kyoto, 1949.

## CHAPTER VI

### PRINCIPLES AND CRITERIA OF ART

ONCE again we would draw attention to the fundamental importance of art both in the life of a collectivity and in the contemplative life<sup>1</sup>, an importance arising from the fact that man is himself "made in the image of God"<sup>2</sup>: only man is such a direct image, direct in the sense that his form is an "axial" and "ascendant" perfection and his content a totality. Man by his theomorphism is at the same time a work of art and also an artist; a work of art as being an "image", an artist because this image is that of the Divine Artist.<sup>3</sup> Man alone among earthly beings can think, speak and produce works; only he can contemplate and realise the Infinite. Human art, like Divine Art, includes both determinate and indeterminate aspects, results of necessity and of freedom, of rigour and of joy.

This cosmic polarity enables us to establish a primary distinction, namely the distinction between sacred and profane art: in sacred art what is chiefly important is the content and use of the work; in profane art these are no more than an

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<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on "Forms in Art" in *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Faber) and that on "Aesthetics and Symbolism" in *Spiritual Perspectives and Human Facts* (Faber).

<sup>2</sup> In the words of the Bible (Translator's note).

<sup>3</sup> In Masonic terminology God is "The Great Architect of the Universe", but He is also painter, sculptor, musician and poet; there is a Hindu symbolism which represents Him as creating and destroying worlds as He dances.

excuse for the joys of creation. If within the framework of a traditional civilisation art doubtless is never wholly profane, it may become relatively so in so far as its motive force is to be found less in symbolism than in the creative instinct; such art is profane through the absence of a sacred subject or a spiritual symbolism but traditional through the formal discipline that governs its style. The position of non-traditional art is quite different: here there can be no question of sacred art and at most it may be called profane religious art; moreover the motive of such art is "passional" in the sense that an individualistic and undisciplined sentimentality enters the service of religious belief. Whether profane art is naturalistic and "religious", like Christian art of modern times, or both traditional and worldly, like mediaeval European or Indo-Persian miniatures or Japanese wood-cuts, it always presupposes an extra-sacerdotal point of view and so a "worldliness" such as makes its appearance at a relatively late stage in the theocratic civilisations. In primordial periods art always was limited to the production of ritual objects or of working tools and household objects, but even such tools and objects were, like the activities they implied, eminently symbolical and so connected with ritual and with the realm of the sacred.<sup>1</sup>

This brings us to a most important point: to a great extent sacred art ignores the aesthetic aim; its beauty arises chiefly from its spiritual truth and so from the exactitude of its symbolism and from its usefulness for purposes of ritual and

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<sup>1</sup> Highly significant, in its very exaggeration, was the reaction of a Sioux chief, (quoted by Charles Eastman in *The Indian Today*) on being shown a picture gallery. "So this is the white man's strange wisdom", he exclaimed. "He cuts down the forests which have stood in pride and grandeur for centuries, he tears up the breast of our mother the earth and befouls the streams of clear water; without pity he disfigures the paintings and monuments of God and then bedaubes a surface with colour and calls it a masterpiece!" In this connection it must be pointed out that the painting of the Redskins is a writing, or, to be more precise, a pictography.



contemplation, and only secondarily from the imponderables of personal intuition; in actual fact the alternative between these claims could not present itself. In a world which knew no ugliness on the level of human products—a world, in other words, to which error in forms was still unknown—aesthetic quality could not be a primary consideration; beauty was everywhere, beginning with nature and with man himself. If aesthetic intuition in the deepest sense has its own importance in certain modes of spirituality, only in a secondary manner does it enter into the genesis of a work of sacred art; in that process, first of all, beauty does not have to be a direct aim, and, in the second place, beauty is ensured by the completeness and integrity of the symbol and by the traditional quality of the work<sup>1</sup>. This must not, however, make one lose sight of the fact that a feeling for beauty, and so also a need for beauty, is natural in normal man and is indeed the very condition behind the detachment of the traditional artist in regard to the aesthetic quality of sacred work; in other words a major preoccupation with this quality would for him amount to a pleonasm. Not to feel the need for beauty is an infirmity, not unrelated to the inescapable sordidness of the machine age, which under industrialism has become widespread; since it is impossible to get away from industrialism people make a virtue of this infirmity and calumniate both beauty and the need for it: this is like the proverbial saying that, if a man wants to drown his dog, he will say it is mad. Those whose interest lies in the public assassination of beauty seek to discredit it by the use of such terms as “picturesque” and “romantic”—just as

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<sup>1</sup> Professed aesthetes are inevitably profane in their point of view; they betray their insufficiency by the air of unintelligence apparent both in their own art and in the way they exercise their choice, as well as by the fact that on certain levels their taste always tends to be somewhat coarse. For most Europeans of the 18th and 19th centuries ikons were “ugly”; it may be that their own work was not exactly ugly, but it was certainly lacking in truth and intelligence.

people seek to suffocate religion by labelling it "fanaticism"—and by passing off what is ugly and trivial as "realistic"; this is to reduce beauty to a mere luxury of painters and poets. The cult of chance—of a chance that is ugly and trivial—betrays just the same intention: the world "as it is" is but ugliness and triviality garnered in the chaos of coincidences.<sup>1</sup> There is an affectation of angelic virtue which pretends to circumvent this problem by an appeal to "pure spirit" and is all the more unpleasant for being allied to the so-called "sincerity" of a man claiming to be "dedicated" or "authentic". When things are looked at in this way people soon come to regard as "spiritual"—because "sincere"—things which are the very antipodes of spirituality. The abolition of beauty, whether it be "sincere" or not, means the end of the intelligibility of the world.

To return to the main question: if sacred art expresses what is spiritual either directly or indirectly, profane art must also express some value, unless it is to lose all legitimacy; the value it expresses, apart from the value of which every traditional style is the vehicle, is, first, the cosmic quality of its content and, secondly, the virtue and intelligence of the artist. Here therefore it is the subjective value of the man which predominates, but—and this is essential—that value is determined by the sacred, by the fact that the artist is integrated into a traditional civilisation the genius of which he inevitably expresses; in other words he makes himself the exponent, not only of personal, but also of collective values, since both alike

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<sup>1</sup> In France, for instance, advertisement posters and hoardings are spread about like some filthy and insolent gangrene devouring the countryside; they are to be found not merely in towns but also in the tiniest hamlets and even on isolated ruins, and this is equivalent to the destruction, or partial destruction, of both country and fatherland. We write thus, not in the name of the picturesque, which does not interest us in the slightest, but in defence of the soul of a people. Such desperate triviality is like the trade-mark of the machines which seek to devour our souls and are thus shown up as "the fruit of sin".

are determined by the tradition in question. The genius is at the same time traditional and collective, spiritual and racial and also, secondarily, personal; personal genius is nothing without the concurrence of a deeper and wider genius. Sacred art represents above all the spirit, and profane art the collective soul or genius, but this of course presupposes that it is integrated in the tradition. Taken together spiritual genius and collective genius make up traditional genius which gives its imprint to the whole civilisation.<sup>1</sup>

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Before going further we should perhaps define the term "sacred", although it belongs to the category of things which are blindingly clear. Precisely because of this very clarity, however such realities have become for many people incomprehensible, as is also true of such terms as "being" and "truth". What then is the sacred in relation to the world? It is the interference of the uncreated in the created, of the eternal in time, of the infinite in space, of the supraformal in forms; it is the mysterious introduction into one realm of existence of a presence which in reality contains and transcends that realm and could cause it to burst asunder in a sort of divine explosion. The sacred is the incommensurable, the transcendent, hidden within a fragile form belonging to this world; it has its own precise rules, its terrible aspects and its merciful action; moreover any violation of the sacred, even in art, has incalculable

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<sup>1</sup> In traditional art are to be found creations—or rather what might well be called revelations—which may appear unimportant to those who are prejudiced in favour of individual "masterpieces" as well as from the point of view of the "classical" categories of art; but these creations are none the less among the irreplaceable works of human genius. Such are the Nordic decorations, so rich in primordial symbols, the motifs of which are also to be found in the rustic art of most European countries and indeed even in the depths of the Sahara; such also are the Abyssinian processional crosses, the Shinto *toriis*, the majestic eagle-feather head-dresses of the American Indians and the Hindu *saris* in which splendid dignity is combined with grace.

repercussions. Intrinsically the sacred is inviolable, and so much so that any attempted violation recoils on the head of the violator.

The supernatural value of sacred art arises from the fact that it conveys transcendent values and communicates an intelligence which is lacking in the collectivity. Like virgin nature it has a quality and function of intelligence which it manifests through beauty because in essence it belongs to the formal order; sacred art is the form of what lies Beyond Form, it is the image of the Uncreated, the language of Silence. But as soon as artistic initiative becomes detached from tradition, which links it to the sacred, this guarantee of intelligence fails and stupidity shows through everywhere: aestheticism is moreover the very last thing to preserve us from this danger.

An art is sacred, not through the personal aims of the artist, but through its content, its symbolism and its style, that is, through objective elements. By its content: because the subject must be as prescribed either when following a canonical model or in a wider sense; always, however, it must be canonically determined. By its symbolism: because the sacred personage, or the anthropomorphic symbol, must be clothed or adorned in a given manner and not differently and may be making certain gestures but not others. By its style: because the image must be expressed in a particular hieratic formal language and not in some foreign or imagined style. In brief, the picture must be sacred in its content, symbolical in its detail and hieratic in its treatment; otherwise it will be lacking in spiritual truth, in liturgical quality and—even more certainly—in sacramental character. On pain of losing all right to existence art has no right to infringe these rules and has the less interest in doing so since these seeming restrictions confer on it, by their intellectual and aesthetic truth, qualities of depth and power such as the individual artist has very small chance of drawing out of himself.

The rights of art, or more exactly of the artist, lie in the technical, spiritual and intellectual qualities of the work; these three qualities are so many modes of originality. In other words the artist can be original through the aesthetic quality of his work, by the nobility or piety reflected in it and by the intelligence or knowledge which enable him to find inexhaustible variations within the framework laid down by tradition. All sacred art proves that this framework is relatively wide: it does indeed restrict incapacity but not either talent or intelligence. True genius can develop without making innovations: it attains perfection, depth and power of expression almost imperceptibly by means of the imponderables of truth and beauty ripened in that humility without which there can be no true greatness. From the point of view of sacred art or even from that of merely traditional art, to know whether a work is an "original", or a "copy" is a matter of no concern: in a series of copies of a single canonical model one of them, which may be less "original" than some other, is a work of genius through a concatenation of precious conditions which have nothing to do with any affectation of originality or other posturing of the ego.

Apart from its function as a direct aid to spirituality sacred art is indispensable as a support for the intelligence of the collectivity: to abolish sacred art as was done in the Renaissance or in Greece in the fifth century B.C. is to abolish also that intelligence—one might say that intellectuality—and so to give free rein to a sensibility governed by passion and therefore ungovernable.<sup>1</sup> Moreover the theological function of religious art must not be overlooked: art should by its determinate

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<sup>1</sup> It is, of course, the "collective intelligence" which is here in question, not intelligence without qualification: Greek decadence did not affect the spirit of a man like Plato. If, however, the collective intelligence is compromised, that clearly will render the unfolding of particular intelligences more uncertain. What Greek decadence had destroyed Christianity recreated to last for a thousand years.

aspects teach revealed truths, that is, by its types or models, and it should suggest spiritual imponderables by subtle aspects which will depend on the intuition of the artist. Naturalistic religious art, however, makes truth seem improbable and virtue odious for the simple reason that in it truth is overwhelmed by the stridency of a necessarily false description while virtue is drowned in an almost unavoidable hypocrisy; naturalism compels the artist to represent what he could not have seen as if he had seen it, and to manifest sublime virtue as if he himself possessed it.

This teaching function is also incumbent, though far less directly, on profane art when it is linked to the tradition by its style and by the mentality of the artist; in European mediaeval miniatures it is possible to discern an expression of the Christian spirit doubtless indirect, but none the less intelligible. The opportuneness of profane art is, however, psychological rather than spiritual, so that it always remains something of a two-edged sword or a "lesser ill" and one must not be surprised at the severe condemnations launched against profane art in periods still stamped with a sacerdotal outlook. Here as in other fields the functions of things may alter according to circumstances.

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Scriptures, anagogy and art are derived from Revelation though at very different degrees. Scriptures are the direct expression of the Speech of Heaven, whilst anagogy is its inspired and indispensable commentary<sup>1</sup>; art constitutes as it were the extreme limit or material shell of the tradition and thus, by virtue of the law that extremes meet, rejoins what is most inward in it, so that art is itself inseparable from inspiration.

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<sup>1</sup> We are referring to essential commentaries the inspiration of which, though secondary, is nonetheless a necessary concomitant of Revelation; other commentaries, whether metaphysical, mystical or legal, may not be indispensable.

Anagogy is the vehicle for metaphysical and mystical intelligence—leaving aside purely legal interpretation—whereas art is the support of the collective intelligence and is contingent to the same degree as is the collectivity as such. In other words, scriptural Revelation is accompanied by two secondary currents, the one inward and indispensable for men of contemplative bent, the other external and indispensable for the generality of people. For the sage there is no common measure between the commentary on Scripture and art; he may even do without the latter provided he replaces it by an emptiness or by virgin nature and not by a falsified art. For the tradition as a whole, however, art assumes an importance almost as great as exegesis, since tradition cannot manifest itself apart from forms. Again, if an elite have far more need of exegesis than of art, the generality of people have on the contrary far more need of art than of metaphysical and mystical doctrines; but, since the elite depend “physically” on the whole collectivity, they too indirectly have need of art.

Commentary in the widest sense has, however, an aspect that is external because it treats among other things of exoteric questions. Inversely, art has an aspect that is inward and profound by virtue of its symbolism; it then fulfils a different function and speaks directly to the contemplative mind: in this way it becomes a support for intellection, thanks to its non-mental, concrete and direct manner of speech. Besides the metaphysical and mystical commentary on Scripture there is a legal and moral commentary addressed to the community as a whole, just as there is, besides the formal and collective function of art, a function that is strictly spiritual and esoteric. Seen from the latter point of view art will be more inward and more profound than verbal expositions, and this explains the central function which a sacred image, such as that of the Buddha, can assume. There is a highly significant connection between the loss of a sacred art and the loss of anagogy, as is

shown by the Renaissance: naturalism could not kill symbolism—sacred art—without humanism killing anagogy and, with it, gnosis. This is so because these two elements, anagogical science and symbolical art are essentially related to pure intellectuality.<sup>1</sup>

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Of Hindu figurative art it can be said that it is derived from the postures and gestures of *yoga* and of the mythological dance. Dancing, the divine art of Śiva-Natarāja, the Lord of the Dance, was revealed to the sage Bharata muni by Śiva and His spouse Pārvatī themselves and was codified by the sage in the *Bharata-Nāṭya-Śāstra*. Hindu music, closely connected as it is with dancing, is founded on the *Sāma-Veda*, its rhythms being derived from the Sanskrit metres. It is dancing which provides the determining note of the whole of Hindu art: sacred images translate this figurative mythology—or figurative metaphysic—in terms of inert matter.<sup>2</sup> Let us add that this art is neither moral nor immoral, for the Hindu sees in sexual matters their essential cosmic or divine aspect

<sup>1</sup> Guénon wrote somewhere that the Middle Ages were the only period in which the West as a whole knew a true intellectual development; and it was not by chance that this was also the only period in which the West knew a sacred art, if in both cases we leave aside more or less prehistoric times and isolated survivals of these times such as Pythagoreanism and Nordic art.

<sup>2</sup> “Without knowledge of the science of dancing it is hard to understand the rules of painting” (*Viṣṇudharmōttara*). “Only those sculptures or paintings should be judged beautiful which conform to canonical prescriptions, not those which please a personal taste or fantasy” (*Śukrācārya*). “The particular form suitable to each image is to be found described in the *Śilpa-Śāstras*, the canonical texts followed by the image-makers. . . . These texts supply the data needed for the mental representation which serves as the sculptor’s model. According to his vision, says Śukrācārya, he will fashion in temples the image of the divinity he adores. It is thus, and not by some other means, in truth and not by direct observation, that he will be able to attain his goal.—The essential part of art, ‘visualisation’ [and one could say the same of the ecstatic audition of the musician] is thus a kind of *yoga*; the artist is sometimes looked on as a sort of *yogi*. Often, before undertaking his work, he celebrates certain special rites aimed at stifling the working of the



and not their accidental physical aspect<sup>1</sup>. Hindu architecture also has a foundation in the Scriptures, which describe its celestial origin; its profound connection with Hindu dancing results from the form of the Vedic sacrifice.<sup>2</sup> The whole of Hindu architecture is essentially a co-ordination of the circle and the square in accord with the Vedic altar of fire, Agni; in other words the architecture is derived from the primordial altar.<sup>3</sup>

If there is something vegetative, and thus alive, about the Hindu temple because of this sort of spiritualised sensuality characterising the Hindu soul—a sensuality always close to asceticism and death and opening on to the Infinite—Greek and Egyptian temples mark, each in their own way, an opposite point of view. The Greek temple relates to a perspective of wisdom marked by a clarity which is no doubt already too rational; it indicates measure and the logical finite.

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conscious will and setting free the subjective faculties. In this case truth does not come from visual observation but from 'muscular consciousness' of the movements the artist has understood and realised in his own members.—The Śāstras also give the canons of proportion. These proportions vary according to the divinity to be represented. Architecture also has its own canons which regulate even the very smallest details." (A. Coomaraswamy: *Understanding Hindu Art*).

<sup>1</sup> The average Western man is always ready to reproach Hindus for what he takes to be "impurity"; for a true Hindu it is this very reproach that shows an impure attitude.

<sup>2</sup> "It is hardly necessary to point out that the Vedic sacrifice, which is always described as the imitation of 'what was at the beginning', is, in all its forms and in the full meaning of the terms, a work of art and at the same time a synthesis of the arts of liturgy and architecture, and one can say the same of the Christian Mass (which is equally a sacrifice in mime) where the dramatic and architectural elements are inseparably united." (A. Coomaraswamy: *The Nature of 'Folk-lore' and 'Popular Art' in Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art*, New York, 1956).

<sup>3</sup> Hindu cosmology concerning the cardinal points and architecture coincides remarkably with that of the North American Indians, and also to some extent with that of the peoples of Siberia, so that it is easy to see in this fact a same heritage from the Hyperborean tradition. The circle appears again in the form of the Redskins' camp surrounding the central fire, as also in the form of their tents or huts, while the symbolism of the square is actualised in the rite of the Sacred Pipe. (See chapter IX).

The use of marble and the choice of profane subjects went hand in hand with the decadence of Greek statuary which originally used wood and metal and represented only the Gods. As for the Egyptian temple, it stands, not "in space" like the Greek temple, but "in eternity"; it suggests the mystery of the Immutable and gives the impression of being of the same order as the starry vault of heaven.

Christian art for its part is founded, from a doctrinal point of view, on the mystery of the Son, "Image" of the Father, or the mystery of God "become man" (or image) in order that man (made in the image of God) might "become God". In this art the central element is painting: tradition says that it goes back to the likeness of Christ miraculously imprinted on a cloth sent to King Abgar, as also to the portrait of the Virgin Mary painted by St. Luke; another archetype of ikons of the Blessed Face is, by its very nature, the Holy Shroud, prototype of the sacred portraits, and again the Crucifix. The Seventh Oecumenical Council declared that "the painting of ikons is in no wise an invention of painters, but is on the contrary an established institution and tradition of the Church".<sup>1</sup> But the general use

<sup>1</sup> In the sixteenth century the Patriarch Nikon ordered the destruction of ikons influenced by the Renaissance and threatened with excommunication those who painted or owned such paintings. After him the Patriarch Joachim required by his Will that ikons should always be painted according to ancient models and not "follow Latin or German models, which are invented according to the personal whim of the artist and corrupt the tradition of the Church". Many texts of this kind could be cited. In India, tradition speaks of the painter Chitrakāra who was cursed by a brāhmin for having broken the rules in the composition of a painting for which he had received a commission. If painted pictures are a necessary expression of Christian spirituality, sculptured images have only a secondary necessity which is also more or less "local". A cathedral covered with sculpture is assuredly a profound and powerful expression of Christianity, but one that is essentially determined by a fusion of Teutonic with Latin genius. A Gothic facade aims at embodying a preaching as concretely as possible; it may include esoteric elements—and indeed must do so by reason of its symbolism—but it has not the quasi-sacramental character of an ikonostasis, a character moreover that Charlemagne misunderstood because of his typically Western "rationalism" according to

of ikons was not imposed without difficulty: if the early Christians had some difficulty in admitting them this was by reason of the heritage of Judaism; their scruples were of the same order as those of the Jewish-born Christians over abandoning the Mosaic prescriptions about food. It is in the nature of certain traditional values that they are only actualised fully in a particular human situation; in the realm of sacred art the doctrine of St. John Damascene was providential because it formulated truths which could not have been enunciated in the earliest days of Christianity.

Sacred art also has fields which are more or less secondary, not by definition, but from the point of view of a particular traditional perspective—in Christianity, for example, architecture and enamel work; and it often contains elements drawn from pre-existing art which provide the primary matter—up till then symbolically “in chaos”—for the new art: thus it was that the spiritual genius of Christianity was able to make use of Graeco-Roman, Oriental and Nordic elements for its artistic expressions. Such elements were reformed into a powerfully original mode of expression and the same can be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of the elements used by the Islamic and Buddhist civilisations.

The Buddhist conception of art is, at least in certain respects, not remote from the Christian: like Christian art Buddhist art is centred on the image of the Superman, bearer of the Revelation, though it differs from the Christian perspective in its non-theism, which brings everything back to the impersonal; if man is logically at the centre of the cosmos, that is, for Buddhism, “by accident” and not from theological necessity as in the case of Christianity; persons are “ideas” rather

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which the purpose of pictures or images was merely didactic. One of the glories of the Western cathedral is its stained glass, which is like an opening towards heaven: the rose-window is like a sparkling symbol of the metaphysical universe, of the cosmic reverberations of the “Self”.

than individuals. Buddhist art evolves round the sacramental image of the Buddha, given, according to one tradition, in the lifetime of the Blessed One in different forms, both sculptural and pictorial. The situation is the opposite of that of Christian art, for here statuary is more important than painting although the latter is none the less strictly canonical and not "optional" like Christian statuary. In the realm of architecture, we may mention the *stūpa* of Piprava built immediately after the death of Sākyamuni; apart from this, elements of Hindu and Chinese art were transmuted into a new art of which there were a number of variants both in the Theravāda and the Mahāyāna schools. From a doctrinal point of view the art in this case is founded on the idea of the saving virtue emanating from the superhuman beauty of the Buddhas: the images of the Blessed One, of other Buddhas, and of Bodhisattvas are sacramental crystallisations of this virtue, which is also manifested in cult objects, "abstract" as to their form but "concrete" in their nature. This principle furnishes a conclusive argument against profane religious art as practised in the West, for the celestial beauty of the Man-God extends to the whole traditional art, whatever may be the particular style required by a given collectivity; to deny traditional art—and here we have Christianity chiefly in mind—is to deny the saving beauty of the Word made flesh; it is to be ignorant of the fact that in true Christian art there is something of Jesus and something of the Virgin. Profane art replaces the soul of the Man-God, or of the Perfected Man, by that of the artist and of his human model.

In Chinese art—if we set aside Hindu influences in its Buddhist art—everything seems to be derived, on the one hand from the writing, which has a sacred character, and on the other hand from nature, which is also sacred and is observed lovingly inasmuch as it is a permanent revelation of Universal Principles. Certain techniques and materials—

bronze, paper, Indian ink, lacquer, silk, bamboo and porcelain—contribute to the originality of this art and determine certain of its modes. The connection between calligraphy and painting is both close and decisive, a connection also to be found in Egyptian art. Writing is a form of painting; the Yellow people trace their characters with a brush and their painting holds a quality of writing; hand and eye retain the same reflexes. Of Confucianist painting it can be said that it is neither essentially sacred nor yet wholly profane; its aim is ethical in a very loose sense of that term; it tends to represent the “objective” innocence of things and not their “inner” reality. As for Taoist landscapes, these externalise a metaphysic and a contemplative state: they spring, not from space, but from the “void”; their theme is essentially “mountain and water” and with this they combine cosmological and metaphysical aims. Here is one of the most powerfully original forms of sacred art; in a certain sense it stands at the antipodes of Hindu art in which the principle of expression is precision and rhythm and not the ethereal subtleties of a contemplation made up of imponderables. It is not surprising that *Chan* Buddhism (*Zen* in Japanese), of which the character is at once inarticulate and rich in shades of meaning, should have found in Taoist art a congenial mode of expression.<sup>1</sup>

In architecture the major buildings of the Yellow race have the same superimposed curves as the pines which surround them; the wide, horned and in a sense vegetative shape of the Far-Eastern roof—the whole usually resting on wooden columns—even if its prototype is not to be found in the sacred conifers, all the same retraces their dynamic and majestic life.

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<sup>1</sup> In speaking of Chinese art we include also that of Japan which is a highly original branch of that art with its own particular spirit combining sobriety, boldness, elegance and contemplative intuition. The Japanese house combines the natural nobility of materials and simplicity of forms with extreme artistic refinement and this makes it one of the most original manifestations of art as a whole.

When a man of the Yellow race enters a temple or palace he enters a "forest" rather than a "cavern"<sup>1</sup>; this architecture has about it something living, something vegetable and warm; even the magic aim of the inverted curve of the hips, which give the protecting roof a certain defensive aspect, bring us back to the connection between trees and lightning and so to virgin nature.<sup>2</sup>

The non-figurative or abstract arts of Judaism and Islam must not be overlooked. The former was revealed in the Torah itself and is exclusively sacerdotal. The latter is akin to it by its exclusion of human and animal representations; as to its origin, it issued from the sensory form of the revealed Book, that is, from the interlaced letters of the verses of the Koran, and also—paradoxical though this may seem—from the forbidding of images. This restriction in Islamic art, by eliminating certain creative possibilities intensified others, the more so since it was accompanied by express permission to represent plants; hence the capital importance of arabesques, of geometrical and botanical decorative motifs.<sup>3</sup> Islamic

<sup>1</sup> A Gothic cathedral is a petrified forest, in one way welcoming, though in another it remains cold; to the idea of protection it adds the idea of eternity and so mingles a celestial coldness with mercy. Its stained glass windows are like a sky glimpsed through the foliage of a forest of stone.

<sup>2</sup> There is a theory that the Chinese roof represents a boat upside down: according to a Sino-Malayan myth the sun comes from the East in a boat and the boat is wrecked in the West and, turning over, covers the sun, thus producing night; a connection is made, not only between the overturned boat and the darkness of night, but also, as a consequence, between a roof and the sleep it protects. Another source of Far-Eastern architecture, so far as the wooden columns are concerned, may be the primitive Sino-Malayan lake-dwellings. (See E. Fuhkmann: *China*, Hagen, 1921.)

<sup>3</sup> Persian miniatures integrate things in a surface, without perspective, and thus in a sense without limits, like a piece of weaving, and it is this which makes them compatible—at any rate as "worldly" objects—with the Islamic perspective. In a general way Moslems distrust any "materialisation" of religious subjects as if in fear that spiritual realities might become exhausted through an excess of sensory crystallisation. The sculptured and dramatic imagery of the Roman Church has indeed proved

architecture, inherited from the neighbouring civilisations, was transmuted by its own particular genius which tended at the same time both to simplification and to ornamentation; the purest expression of this genius is beyond question the art of the Maghreb, where no pre-existing formalism invited concessions. In Islam the love of beauty compensates for the tendency to austere simplicity; it lends elegant forms to simplicity and partially clothes it in a profusion of precious and abstract lacework. "God is Beautiful", said the Prophet, "and He loves beauty."<sup>1</sup>

All that has just been said certainly does not mean that partial deviations may not arise even in traditional art: especially in the case of the plastic arts it sometimes happens that a more or less superficial virtuosity stifles the clarity of the symbolism and the inner reality of the work; worldliness can lead to errors and faults of taste even in sacred art, although the hieratic quality of the latter reduces the danger of such deviations to a minimum.

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After these very summary considerations let us return to the purely technical aspects of art. It is necessary to make a distinction between intentional stylisation and mere individual lack of skill, evidenced either by an opacity introduced into the style or by an impression of work that is unintelligent, a two-edged sword; instead of making it "tender" and "popular" the Church ought to have maintained in it the hieratic abstraction of Romanesque statuary. It is not the sole obligation of art to "come down" towards the common people; it should also remain faithful to its intrinsic truth in order to allow men to "rise" towards that truth.

<sup>1</sup> It is understandable that the smiling grace of Islamic architecture should have appeared to many Christians as something worldly and "pagan"; the perspective of will envisages the "here below" and the "beyond" only as levels of existence which mark separation and opposition and not as universal essences which unite and make identical. In Renaissance art virtue becomes crushing, lugubrious and tiresome: beside the Alhambra the palace of Charles V seeks to be grave and austere but only achieves a heaviness and opacity which banish all higher intelligence, contemplation and serenity.

cumbersome and arbitrary. In other words it is necessary to know how to differentiate between an "artlessness" which, in transmitting positive suggestions, becomes thereby precious, and faults due to the personal incompetence or grossness of the artisan. An apparent fault in drawing may arise from an intuition of harmony and may contribute to beauty of expression, of composition, of equilibrium; precision of drawing may be subordinated to other more important qualities to the extent that the content is spiritual. Apart from this, if traditional art cannot be always and everywhere at a peak of attainment, this is not because of any principal insufficiency but because of man's intellectual and moral insufficiencies which cannot fail to become exteriorised in art as in his other activities.

The agreement of a picture with nature is legitimate only in so far as it does not abolish the separation between the work of art and its external model; without such separation the former loses its sufficient reason, for its purpose is not merely to repeat what already exists; the exactness of its proportions must neither do violence to the material—the plane surface in the case of a painting and the inert material in the case of sculpture—nor yet compromise the spiritual expression; if the rightness of the proportions is in accord with the material data of the particular art while also satisfying the spiritual aim of the work, it will add something of intelligence and so also of truth to the symbolism of the work. Authentic and normative art always tends to combine intelligent observation of nature with noble and profound stylisations in order, first, to assimilate the work to the model created by God in nature and, secondly, to separate it from physical contingency by giving it an imprint of pure spirit, of synthesis, of what is essential. It can definitely be said that naturalism is legitimate in so far as physical exactness is allied to a vision of the Platonic Idea, the qualitative archetype; hence, in such work,



the predominance of the static, of symmetry, of the "essential".<sup>1</sup> But we must also take account of this: if we start out from the idea that "form" is in one way necessarily opposed to "essence", the latter being the universal inwardness and the former the "accidental" outwardness, we can explain certain deformations practised in sacred art as a reduction to the essence or as a "scorching by the essence". The essence will then appear as an "inner fire" which disfigures, or as an "abyss" in which proportions are shattered, so that what is sacred and "formless" (in the spiritual, not in the chaotic sense) is like an irruption of essence into form.

Again, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that the human spirit cannot be simultaneously deployed in all directions. Since traditional symbolism by no means implies by definition an observation of physical forms carried to extreme lengths there is no reason for a sacerdotal art to tend towards such observation; it will be content with what the natural genius of the race requires, and this explains that mixture of "deforming" symbolism and refined observation which characterises sacred art in general. At times the qualitative aspect does violence to the quantitative reality: Hindu art marks femininity by the breasts and hips and gives them the importance of ideograms; it turns into symbols characteristics which would otherwise simply be accepted as natural facts, and this is related to the "deforming essence" mentioned above. As for simple lack of physical observation, which as such is independent of any symbolical aim, we would add that, where it is conditioned by the requirements of a particular collective soul, it is an integral part of a style and so of a language which is in itself intelligent and noble; this is

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<sup>1</sup> In this connection Egyptian art is particularly instructive; other examples of this coincidence of "natural" and "essential" can be found in Far-Eastern art and also in the admirable bronze and pottery heads found among the Yorubas of Ife in West Africa which are among the most perfect of works of art to be found anywhere.

something quite different from the technical clumsiness of some isolated artist. Complete naturalism, which reproduces the chance variations and accidental aspect of appearances, is truly an abuse of intelligence such as might be called "Luciferian"<sup>1</sup>: it could not, therefore, characterise traditional art. Moreover, if the difference between a naturalistic drawing and a stylised but unskilful drawing, or that between a flat and decorative painting and another in which there are shadows and perspective, just represented progress, this progress would be tremendous and also inexplicable because of its very tremendousness. If one were to suppose that the Greeks—and after them the Christians—had been for many centuries incapable of looking and drawing, how could one then explain that these same men became endowed with ability to look and draw after a lapse of time that was relatively very short? This easy change between incommensurable positions proves that there was here no real progress and that on the contrary naturalism only represents a more exteriorised outlook combined with the efforts of observation and skill called for by this new way of viewing things.

In short, the whole of the so-called miracle of Greece amounts to a substitution of one-sided reason for intelligence; apart from the rationalism which inaugurated it, artistic naturalism would have been inconceivable. Extreme naturalism results from the cult of "form", of form envisaged as something finite and not as "symbol"; reason indeed regulates the science of the finite, of limits and of order, so that it is only logical that an art which is directed by reason should share with reason itself a flatness refractory to all mystery.

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<sup>1</sup> This abuse of intelligence is extremely characteristic of modern civilisation. Many things are taken to be superior—as indeed they are if considered in artificial isolation—which are in fact merely hypertrophic; artistic naturalism is just that, at any rate when taken as an end in itself and when it consequently expresses nothing more than the limitations of form and of the accidental.

The art of classical antiquity is often compared to the brightness of full daylight; it is forgotten that it also has the "exterior" quality of daylight, which lacks any aspect of the secret and the infinite. From the point of view of this rationalistic ideal the art of the cathedrals, and also Asiatic art, inevitably appears chaotic, "disorderly", irrational and inhuman.

If we start from the idea that perfect art can be recognised by three main criteria—nobility of content, this being a spiritual condition, apart from which art has no right to exist; exactness of symbolism or at least, in the case of profane works of art, harmony of composition<sup>1</sup>; and purity of style or elegance of line and colour—we can discern with the help of these criteria the qualities and defects of any work of art, whether sacred or not. It goes without saying that some modern work may, as if by chance, possess these qualities; none the less it would be a mistake to see in this any justification of an art that is deprived of all positive principles; the exceptional qualities of such a work are in any case far from being characteristic of the art in question when viewed as a whole, but appear only incidentally under cover of the eclecticism which goes with anarchy. The existence of such works proves, however, that a legitimate profane art is conceivable in the West without any need to return purely and simply to the miniatures of the Middle Ages or to peasant painting<sup>2</sup>, for a healthy state of soul and a normal treatment of

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<sup>1</sup> This condition equally requires right measure in regard to size; a profane work should never exceed certain dimensions; those are, for miniatures, very small—to mention one example.

<sup>2</sup> Obviously the same cannot be said so far as sacred art is concerned; in the West this is exclusively the art of ikons and cathedrals and has by definition a character of immutability. Here let us once again mention the popular art of various European countries, which is, at any rate in a relative sense, Nordic in origin, though it is difficult to assign a precise origin to an art of immemorial antiquity. This "rustic" art, preserved chiefly among the Teutons and Slavs, has also no clear geographical

materials always guarantee the rectitude of an art devoid of pretensions. It is the nature of things—on the spiritual and on the psychological as well as on the material and technical level—which demands that each of the constituent elements of art should fulfil certain elementary conditions, these being precisely the ones by which all traditional art is governed.

Here it is important to point out that one of the major errors of modern art is its confusion of art materials: people no longer know how to distinguish the cosmic significance of stone, iron or wood, just as they do not know the objective qualities of forms or colours. Stone has this in common with iron that it is cold and implacable, whereas wood is warm, live and kindly; but, while the cold of stone is neutral and indifferent like that of eternity, iron is hostile, aggressive and ill-natured, and this enables us to understand the significance of the invasion of the world by iron.<sup>1</sup> The heavy and sinister nature of iron requires that in its use in handicrafts it should be treated lightly and with fantasy such as one sees for instance in old church screens which resemble lacework. The nature in iron ought to be neutralised by transparency in its treatment, for this does no violence to the nature of this metal but on the contrary confers legitimacy on its qualities of hardness and inflexibility by thus turning them to account; the sinister nature of iron implies that it has no right to full and direct manifestation but should be harshly treated or broken in order to be able to express its virtues. The nature of stone is quite different; in the raw

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limits and even in Africa and Asia certain of its fundamental motifs can be traced, though in the latter case there is no need to presume any borrowing. Here is a most perfect art and one which is in principle capable of bringing health to the chaos in which what remain of our craftsmen are floundering. (The translator would here remind Indian readers that this was in the first place written for Westerners, hence some of the illustrations chosen.)

<sup>1</sup> The accumulation in Christian churches and places of pilgrimage of gross and harsh ironwork cannot but impede the radiation of spiritual forces. It always gives the impression that heaven is imprisoned.

state it has about it something sacred, and this is also true of the noble metals, which are like iron transfigured by cosmic light or fire or by planetary forces. It must be added that concrete—which, like iron, has invaded the whole world—is a base and quantitative sort of counterfeit stone; in it the spiritual aspect of eternity is replaced by an anonymous and brutal heaviness; if stone is implacable like death, concrete is brutal like an overwhelming destruction.

Before proceeding further we would wish to add the following reflection, not unrelated to the tyrannous expansion of the use of iron: it is easy to be astonished at the haste shown by the most artistic peoples of the East in adopting ugly things of the modern world; but it must not be overlooked that, apart from any question of aesthetics or spirituality, people have in all ages imitated those who were strongest: before having strength people want to have at least the appearance of strength, and the ugly things of the modern world have become synonymous with power and independence. The essence of artistic beauty is spiritual, whereas material strength is “worldly”, and, since the worldly regard strength as synonymous with intelligence, the beauty of the tradition becomes synonymous not merely with weakness, but also with stupidity, illusion and the ridiculous; being ashamed of weakness is almost always accompanied by hatred of what is looked on as the cause of this apparent inferiority—in this case, tradition, contemplation, truth. If most people—regardless of social level—have not enough discernment to overcome this lamentable optical illusion, some salutary reactions are none the less observable in some quarters.

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It is told of Til Eulenspiegel<sup>1</sup> that, having been engaged as court painter to a prince, he presented to the assembled company a blank canvas, declaring that whoever was not the

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<sup>1</sup> A character of mediaeval legend, famous for his pranks.

child of honest parents would see nothing on the canvas. Since none of the assembled lords was willing to admit he saw nothing, all pretended to admire the blank canvas. Now there was a time when this tale could pass as a pleasantry and none would have dared to foretell that it would one day enter into the manners of a "civilised" world. But in our day a nobody can in the name of "art for art's sake" show us anything he likes<sup>1</sup> and, if we cry out in protest in the name of truth and intelligence, we are told we have not understood, as though some mysterious deficiency prevented us from understanding, not Chinese or Aztec art, but some inferior daub by a European living in the next street. By an abuse of language very prevalent today "to understand" means "to accept" and to reject means not to understand, as if it never happened that one refuses something precisely because one does understand it or accepts it only because one does not.

Behind all this lies a double and fundamental error but for which the pretensions of so-called artists would be inconceivable: it is the error of supposing that an originality which runs quite contrary to the hereditary collective norm is psychologically possible in one who is not insane and that a man can produce a true work of art which is not in any degree understandable to a great many intelligent and cultivated people belonging to the same civilisation, the same race and the same period as the self-styled artist<sup>2</sup>. In reality the premisses of such originality or singularity do not exist in the normal human soul; still less do they exist in pure intelligence. Modern singularities, far from relating to some "mystery" of artistic creation, merely spell philosophical error and mental deformity. Everyone believes himself obliged to be a great

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<sup>1</sup> The author is here thinking chiefly of the West (Translator's note).

<sup>2</sup> This is singularity carried to its limit, to the point of caricature. Now it is well known that "singularity" is a defect stigmatised by every monastic discipline; its gravity is related to the sin of pride.

man; novelty is taken for originality, morbid introspection for profundity, cynicism for sincerity and pretentiousness for genius, so that a point is even reached where a diagram of microbes or some zebra-like striping may be accepted as a painting. "Sincerity" is elevated to the rank of an absolute criterion, as though a work of art could not be psychologically "sincere" and at the same time spiritually false or artistically a nullity. Artists so affected make the grave mistake of deliberately ignoring the objective and qualitative value of forms and colours and of believing themselves to be sheltered in a subjectivism which they deem interesting and impenetrable, whereas in reality it is merely commonplace and ridiculous. Their very mistake forces them to have recourse to the lowest possibilities in the world of forms, just as Satan, when he wanted to be as "original" as God, had no choice open to him but the abominable.<sup>1</sup> In a general way cynicism seems to play an important part in a certain atheistical morality: virtue, it says, consists, not in dominating oneself and remaining silent, but in letting oneself run riot and proclaiming the fact from every housetop; every sin is good if boasted of with brutality; a struggle in silence is labelled "hypocrisy" because something remains concealed. To the same order of ideas belongs the belief that it is "sincere" or "realistic" to uncover cynically what nature keeps hidden as though nature acted without good purpose.

The modern conception of art is false in so far as it puts creative imagination—or even just the impulse to create—in the place of qualitative form, or in so far as a subjective

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<sup>1</sup> Modern art builds churches shaped like molluscs and pierces their walls with assymmetrical windows looking like the results of bursts of machine-gun fire as if by this means to betray its own true feelings. However much people may boast of the boldness of some such architectural design they cannot escape the intrinsic meaning of forms: they cannot prevent such a work from being related by the language of its forms to impish phantoms and nightmares: this is spiritualism transmuted into reinforced concrete.

and conjectural valuation is substituted for an objective and spiritual one; to do this is to replace by talent alone—by talent real or illusory—that skill and craftsmanship which must needs enter into the very definition of art, as if talent could have meaning quite apart from the normative constants that are its criteria. It is clear that originality has no meaning except through its content, exactly as is the case with sincerity; the originality of an error or the talent of an incompetent and subversive individual could not offer the slightest interest: a well-executed copy of a good model is worth more than an original creation which is the “sincere” manifestation of an evil genius.<sup>1</sup> When everyone wants to create and no one is willing to copy; when every work wants to be unique instead of inserting itself into a traditional continuity from which it draws its sap and of which it eventually becomes perhaps one of the finest flowers, it only remains for man to cry out his own nothingness in the face of the world; this nothingness will of course be viewed as synonymous with originality, since the less the artist reckes of tradition or normality the greater will his talent be deemed to be. In the same order of ideas let us also mention the prejudice which would require every artist to “make himself anew”, as though human life were not far too short to justify such a requirement or as though artists were not sufficiently numerous to render such a renewal on the part of each of them superfluous. After all one does not complain of the fact that a man’s face remains the same from day to day, nor does one expect Persian art to turn suddenly into Maori art.

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<sup>1</sup> It often happens that the value of a work is denied because someone has discovered—or thinks he has—that it had been wrongly ascribed, as if the value of a work of art lay outside itself. In traditional art the masterpiece is most often an anonymous culmination of a series of replicas; a work of genius is almost always the resultant of a long collective elaboration. For example, many Chinese masterpieces are copies of which the models are unknown.



The error in the thesis of "art for art's sake" really amounts to supposing that there are relativities which bear their adequate justification within themselves, in their own relative nature, and that consequently there are criteria of value inaccessible to pure intelligence and foreign to objective truth. This error involves abolishing the primacy of the spirit and its replacement either by instinct or taste, by criteria that are either purely subjective or else arbitrary. We have already seen that the definition, laws and criteria of art cannot be derived from art itself, that is, from the competence of the artist as such; the foundations of art lie in the spirit, in metaphysical, theological and mystical knowledge, not in knowledge of the craft alone nor yet in genius, for this may be anything at all; in other words the intrinsic principles of art are essentially subordinate to extrinsic principles of a higher order. Art is an activity, an exteriorisation, and thus depends by definition on a knowledge that transcends it and gives it order; apart from such knowledge art has no justification: it is knowledge which determines action, manifestation, form, and never the reverse. It is not necessary to produce works of art oneself in order to have the right to judge an artistic production in its essentials; decisive artistic competence only comes into play in relation to an intellectual competence which must be already present.<sup>1</sup> No relative point of view can claim unqualified competence except in the case of innocuous activities in which competence applies anyhow in a very narrow field; now human art derives from a relative point of view; it is an application, not a principle.

Modern criticism more and more tends to put works of art into factitious categories: art is thus made out to be no

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<sup>1</sup> This competence may, however, be limited to a particular traditional world. The competence of a brāhmin may not extend to Christian ikons, though there is here no limitation of principle. A necessary competence has the "right", though not of course the "duty", to be limited to a particular system of concordant possibilities.

more than a movement, and a point has been reached where works of art are appraised only in terms of other works and apart from any objective and stable criterion. The artist of the "*avant-garde*" is one whose vanity and cynicism impart momentum to the movement; critics seek, not for works which are good in themselves—some of them would deny that such works exist—but for works which are "novel" or "sincere" and can serve as points of reference in a movement which is in reality a downhill slide towards dissolution; the "quality" of art is then seen only in its movement and its relationships, which amounts to saying that no work has intrinsic value; everything has become fugitive and discontinuous. Artistic relativism destroys the very notion of art just as philosophic relativism destroys the notion of truth; relativism of whatever kind kills intelligence. One who despises truth cannot in sound logic propound his own contempt of it as truth.

In the same context it is significant that people are quite ready to extol some so-called artist on the ground that he "expresses his period" as though a period as such—something which may have no particular character—had rights over truth<sup>1</sup>; if what a "surrealist" expresses really corresponded to our times, this expression would prove only one thing, namely, that our times are not worth expressing; very fortunately, however, our times do still contain something besides surrealism. Be that as it may, to pretend that a work of art is good because "it expresses our times" amounts to affirming that a phenomenon is good simply because it expresses something: in that case crime is good because it expresses a criminal tendency, an error is good because it expresses a lack of

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<sup>1</sup> This compliment is even paid to philosophers too; "the existential", the bare fact, everywhere crushes what is true by taking its name. "The contemporary period" is a sort of false divinity in whose name everything seems permissible, whether on the plane of thought, on that of art or even on that of "religion".

knowledge and so forth. What defenders of surrealist tendencies either forget or do not know is above all that forms, whether in pictures, in sculpture, in architecture or in some other medium, arise from a hierarchy of cosmic values and translate either truths or errors so that here there is no place for adventuring; the psychological efficacy of forms, so beneficial when they are true, makes them on the contrary deadly if they are false.

In order to maintain an illusion of objectivity in an all-pervading subjectivity quite imaginary and definitely hysterical qualities are projected into the most insignificant futilities: people discuss endlessly about "shades of contrast and balance" as if these were not to be found everywhere; in doing so they end by trampling in scorn rugs which are masterpieces of abstract art though unsigned. When almost anything may be art and anyone may be an artist, neither the word "art" nor the word "artist" retains any meaning; it is true that there exists a perversion of sensibility and intelligence ready to discover new dimensions and even "drama" in the most uncalled for extravagances, but a sane man has no need to occupy his mind with these things.<sup>1</sup> The great mistake of the surrealists is to believe that profundity lies in the direction of what is individual, that it is this, and not the universal, which is mysterious, and that the mystery grows more profound the more one delves into what is obscure and morbid: this is mystery turned upside down and therefore satanic, and it is at the same time a counterfeit of the "originality"—or uniqueness—of God. The error is to be found, however, also on another and seemingly opposite side: art then becomes an uninspired technique and a work of art amounts to no more

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<sup>1</sup> One can find "abstract" works—though not commonly—which are neither better nor worse than some African shield, but why then make celebrities of their authors, or why not, on the other hand, count every Zulu as one of the immortals?

than a "construction"; there it is not a case of residues of the subconscious, but only of reason and calculation, though this by no means excludes interferences from the irrational any more than intuitive surrealism, for its part excludes calculated procedures. Pseudo-sincere affectations of simplicity do not escape from this same condemnation, for brutal compression and idiotism have no kind of connection with the simplicity of primordial things.

All that has been said above also applies in one way or another both to poetry and to music: here too some people arrogate to themselves the right to call realistic or sincere anything which, they say, "expresses the spirit of our age", when the "reality" to which they refer is only a factitious world from which they can no longer escape: they make a virtue of this incapacity and then disdainfully apply the label of "romanticism" or "nostalgia" to that innate need for harmony which is proper to every normal man. Ultramodern music—"electronic music" for example—is founded on a despising of everything that enters into the very definition of music, and, *mutatis mutandis*, the art of poetry is in similar case: it becomes no more than a system of sounds—most miserably fabricated—which violates the principle at the basis of poetry. There is no possible justification for this puerile mania for "making a clean sweep" of centuries or millennia in order to "start from scratch", coupled with the inventing of new principles, new bases, new structures—such invention is not merely senseless in itself but also incompatible with any creative sincerity. In other words some things are mutually exclusive: no one can call forth a poem from his heart while at the same time inventing *de novo* a language in which to express it. Here, as with the visual arts, the initial error is belief in a quasi-absolute originality, that is, in something which does not answer to any positive possibility, the musical sense of a racial or traditional collectivity not being capable

of a modification extending to its very roots.<sup>1</sup> People talk about "liberating" music from this or that "prejudice", or "convention", or "constraint"; what they really do is to "liberate" it from its own nature just as they have "liberated" painting from painting, poetry from poetry and architecture from architecture; surrealism has "freed" art from art just as by execution a corpse has been freed from life.

This allusion to music obliges us to draw attention to the fact that at the time of the Renaissance and in the following centuries the decadence of European music and poetry was incomparably less—if indeed there was any decadence or in such measure as there was—than that of the plastic arts and of architecture; there is no common measure between the sonnets of Michael-Angelo and the works for which he is more famous<sup>2</sup>, or between Shakespeare or Palestrina and the visual art of their day. The music of the Renaissance, like that of the Middle Ages of which it is a continuation, expresses in sound what is great

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<sup>1</sup> We have heard certain Asiatic music blamed for its "childish melancholy", and this is characteristic of a mental deformation which admires only what is factitious or forced: everything is shut up in a psychosis of "work", of "creation", even of "construction", factors which come to be taken as synonymous with "quality" as though the beauty of a flower or a bird's song depended on laborious and hypercritical research, on an atmosphere of laboratories and vivisection.

<sup>2</sup> Apart from his sonnets the human greatness of Michael-Angelo appears chiefly in his sculpture, in works like the *Moses* or the *Pietà*, and that apart from any question of principles or style. In his painting and architecture this greatness seems crushed by the errors of the period; it gets lost in heaviness and pathos or in the sort of cult of the coldly gigantic which is a dominant mark of the Renaissance; his statuary, moreover, often suffers from this defect. The errors in question reach a sort of paroxysm in an artist like Rubens or, in a rather different way, in the unintelligent classicism of Ingres; on the other hand they are more or less attenuated in the case of delicate romanticists like Chassériau and Moreau, or in the German landscape painters of the same period. With the impressionists the academic spirit fell into discredit; one would gladly believe that this was due to a slightly deeper understanding, but such is not the case, for an unforeseeable change of fashion was enough to call everything once again in question; moreover an academical spirit has already revived within surrealism, though always in the climate of oppressive ugliness characteristic of that school.

and chivalrous in the European soul; it makes one think of wine or mead and of stirring legends of the past. The reason for this disproportion between the arts is that intellectual decadence—decadence of contemplative, not of inventive intelligence—is far more directly manifested in the visual arts, in which elements of intellectuality are strongly involved, than in auditive or “iterative” arts, which chiefly exteriorise the many and various states—and so in the event the beauties—of that plastic substance which is the soul.<sup>1</sup> In the plastic arts and in architecture the Renaissance means an art of passion and megalomania. As for baroque, it is an art that dreams, but in music baroque exteriorises what may be lovable, tender or paradisial in the dream, whereas in the visual arts it manifests the illusory and ludicrous aspects of the dream, enchantment coagulating into a nightmare. In the nineteenth century romantic poetry and music reinforced and made more acute the attachments to earth; like any sentimental individualism this was a terrible sowing of lacerations and sorrows, though in romanticism in the widest sense there are still many beauties one would wish to see integrated into a love of God.

Whilst ancient music included a spiritual value which can still be felt even in music of the end of the eighteenth century, the plane of music changed at the start of the nineteenth century so that it became in fact a kind of substitute for religion or mysticism: more than in the profane music of the preceding periods musical emotion came to assume the function of an

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<sup>1</sup> English architecture was less devastated by the Renaissance and by baroque than that of most continental countries. It may be that, by one of those paradoxes of which history is prodigal, Anglicanism preserved, (against Rome) a certain Mediaeval heritage in matters of art, and this would seem to have been the less unlikely since the English are less creative than Italians, Germans or French. Something analogous could no doubt be said about the popular architecture of Spain and particularly of Andalusia where Arab influence seems to have played the part of a preserver.

irrational excuse for every human frailty; music grew ever more hypersensitive and grandiloquent as "everyday life" became imbued with scientific rationalism and mercantile materialism. But in general it was still real music, linked with cosmic qualities and consequently still capable of becoming, even if only rarely, the vehicle of a movement of the soul towards God.

Let us, however, return to the plastic arts and add this, which will at the same time serve as a conclusion: for contemporary artists and in so far as we are concerned with profane art there can be no question of just "going back", for one never gets back to one's starting point; rather should the valid experiments of naturalism and impressionism be combined with the principles of normal and normalising art<sup>1</sup>, as is in fact done by some artists who are in general little known; modern art—starting from the Renaissance—does include some more or less isolated works which, though they fit into the style of their period, are in a deeper sense opposed to it and neutralise its errors by their own qualities.<sup>2</sup> In the case of sacred art resort to canonical models and treatment is called for without reservation, for, if there is in modern man an originality to which a human being may have a right, this will not fail to show itself within the framework of tradition, as indeed did

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<sup>1</sup> Indian readers are again reminded that the author is in the first place addressing Western artists.

<sup>2</sup> Of famous or well-known painters the elder Brueghel's snow scenes may be quoted and, nearer to our day, Gauguin, some of whose canvases are almost perfect, Van Gogh's flower paintings, Douanier Rousseau with his exotic forests akin to folk painting, and, among our contemporaries, Covarrubias with his Mexican and Balinese subjects. We might perhaps also allude to certain American Indian painters whose work shows, through a naturalistic influence, a vision close to that of the ancient pictography. Conversely, equivalents of the positive experiments of modern art can be found in the most varied types of traditional art, which proves not only that these experiments are compatible with the universal principles of art, but also that—once again—"there is nothing new under the sun".

happen in the Middle Ages with mentalities differing greatly in space and time. But first of all it is essential to learn to see afresh, to look and to understand that what is sacred belongs to the field of the immutable and not to that of change; it is not a question of tolerating a certain artistic stability on the basis of a pretended law of change, but on the contrary of tolerating a certain variation on the basis of the necessary and clear immutability of what is sacred; it is not sufficient that there should be genius, it must also have a right to exist. Words such as "conformism" and "immobilism" have been coined so as to be able to escape with easy conscience from everything which, since it is the clothing with form of Revelation, of necessity participates in Immutability.

In so far as profane art can be legitimate—as it can be, more than ever before, in this period of disfigurement and vulgarity—its mission is one of transmitting qualities of intelligence, beauty and nobility; and this is something which cannot be realised apart from those rules which are imposed on us, not only by the very nature of the art in question, but also by the spiritual truth flowing from the divine prototype of every human creation.



## CHAPTER VII

### PRINCIPLE OF DISTINCTION IN THE SOCIAL ORDER

THE first prerequisite, when setting out to evaluate any institution, especially a sacred one, that has for contingent reasons become a subject of controversy, is to disengage the question at issue, by a clear-cut act of discernment, from all the accretions that human passion, whether individual or collective, may have imposed upon it; otherwise it is useless to speak of forming a judgment and still less of a possible reform.

The subject of caste—for it is of this we are about to treat—is one which nowadays is apt to arouse so much feeling that it is not easy to bring people back into a mood of calm consideration, yet this is what we—and they themselves—must try and bring about, for neither a “conservatism” that is merely defensive nor a bias in favour of precipitate innovation is adequate to meet the challenge of a situation as confused as the present one; there must be clear perception, informed understanding of the question before us, which amounts to this: what is “caste” essentially, not only in relation to the Hindu social system but also, in a more general sense, as an ever present factor in any human collectivity? However, before attempting to discuss the operative principle behind the phenomena of social distinction, it would seem prudent to clear the ground somewhat by disposing of certain accessory matters that have, over this question of caste, played a part

in fogging the issue for many people both in India itself and elsewhere.

In the first place it should be noted that contemporary criticism of caste (or rather of some of its workings) have been of two distinct kinds, with no less differing motives behind them: on the one hand there have been persons of religious bent whose wish was to eliminate from the social system—whether rightly or wrongly is here beside the point—what they deemed to be abuses that had grown with time; while, on the other, there were the out and out modernists whose outlook had been refashioned, as a result of a Westernised education, on entirely profane lines and who attacked caste in the most vicious tones on grounds of its incompatibility with the latest socio-political theories prevailing in the West, theories they wished to propagate at all costs among their fellow countrymen.

The first-named attitude, even if it has often been mistaken in its actual assessment of relevant facts and still oftener in the remedies it proposed, is one with which it is possible to come to terms, on the basis of a more accurate appraisal of those same facts in the light of traditional wisdom; to be desirous of removing such defects as its mishandling by fallible men (unavoidable in this world) may have introduced even into a sacred institution is in no wise incompatible with the traditional spirit, provided it be accompanied by a sense of proportion as well as by a reverent attitude generally; whereas with the second-named attitude no accommodation is possible inasmuch as it represents an expression of insubordination in the face of the sacred such as can properly be described as "*asuric*".

To pass to another aspect of the question, mention must be made of certain current misinterpretations that originated with the Western ethnologists and which have gained credence with regrettable ease in some Indian circles. We are referring

to the attempted explanation of caste simply in terms of an expedient used by ancient fair-skinned conquerors for the purpose of keeping a "coloured" population permanently in subjection. This is a case both of overlooking the fact that a hierarchical arrangement of society analogous to caste has been common to many civilisations besides the Hindu, if in less perfected form, and also of reading into a Vedic setting something akin to that "racist" theory that provided the modern colonialists with a convenient "doctrine" by which to justify their claims.

A similar error consists in turning caste into a synonym for social "classes" in the sense given to this word after the Industrial Revolution in Europe, a sense that subsequently has undergone a still further extension in the Marxist doctrine of the "class war". In point of fact this notion of class, resting as it does, not on qualitative but entirely on economic distinctions, went with the bourgeois mentality of the 19th century and has no place in any traditional conception, whether Indian or European. The peasantry of Europe, for example, wherever they still exist, do not form a "class", being in fact much nearer to a caste in the Indian sense, as is proved by their innate dignity when one compares them with the rootless masses of the big towns, and this also explains the extreme pressure exerted, under the Communist dictatorship, in order to "collectivise" the peasantries; for as long as something like a caste spirit survives among a people, they can never be turned into the physical and mental "proletarians" that the Marxist party overlords have in mind. Incidentally, those who so readily spend their indignation over the shortcomings, sometimes real enough but also often exaggerated, of a hierarchically ordered social system, would do well to turn their attention occasionally to some of the oppressions and cruelties carried out in our time, often on an unheard of scale, in the name of a supposed equality, for this might help to

bring them to that more balanced view of things which alone can save the would-be reformer from becoming a tyrant in his turn.

The periodic onset of corruption is in the nature of human frailty, the price of preventing it being an unsleeping vigilance such as belongs only to the Saints. Failing this protection, if abuses develop beyond certain proportions some need for readaptation—a *re-form* in the strict sense of the word—may well arise; the history of all the great religions is full of such examples. It is neither the mere fact of abuses nor even the occasional need for the reform we wish to deny, but the reformist competence of those who, without regard for tradition or any sacred values, are prepared to abandon principles and their applications, good use and misuse both together, untaught by the manifold disasters that elsewhere have flowed from similar attempts.

One last point needs mentioning before we take up the main thread of our subject: it is a point that has generally passed unnoticed during discussion of the causes that have led up to the present crisis; we are thinking of the psychological effects that have accompanied the widespread adoption, among large sections belonging to superior castes, of profane Western tastes and ways of thinking such as might very justly have been treated as “untouchable” because of their obviously anti-spiritual character.

When a man, of set preference, fills his house with the shoddiest products of European manufacture while contemptuously banishing all objects of traditional craftsmanship (thus incidentally helping to starve out of existence one of society’s most precious elements) or when that man is heard on all occasions quoting the catch-words of modern sociology, psychology and the like as if they were *śruti* or, if that man be a scholar, when he labels the sacred doctrines of Hinduism (even Vedānta!) as “philosophy” thus classing them with the

purely ratiocinative constructions which in the West go under that name, it becomes difficult for the people around him to take his caste status or his abstentions from contact with this or that any longer at their face value; unconsciously his surviving scruples are bound to convey an impression of mere conventionality, of hypocrisy even. Such an argument is, of course, not strictly valid, for it harbours a certain confusion between things of different orders. It does, however, contain a kind of rough and ready logic that cannot be ignored in times of upheaval like the present, when only the taking up of a firmly intelligent standpoint can save a man from being sucked under by the tide of profaneness flowing on every side.

It should be added, moreover, in respect of the example given above, that here at least is one sphere in which any man is able, within the limits of his own home and family life, to effect something like a traditional restoration by deliberately reversing the process of alienation, at least to a considerable degree. Such initiative, applied without waiting for everybody else to follow suit, has a real spiritual value for the person concerned and it also can have great influence on the views of others, for bad example is not alone in being contagious. This is an aspect of the crisis which should not be overlooked by those who would fain strengthen the traditional loyalties which caste, among other things, engenders.

When all is said and done, however, it is above all necessary to be clear about the nature of the principle here at play, as also about the normal limits of its applicability. It is with this more essential aspect of the question that we must now occupy the reader's attention.

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In common with all other sacred institutions the system of castes is founded on the very nature of things or, to be more exact, on one aspect of that nature, and thus on a reality which in certain circumstances cannot but manifest itself; this

statement is equally valid as regards the opposite aspect, that of the equality of men before God. In short, in order to justify the system of castes it is enough to put the following question: does diversity of qualifications and of heredity exist? If it does, then the system of castes is both possible and legitimate. In the case of an absence of castes, where this is traditionally imposed, the sole question is: are men equal, not just from the point of view of their animality which is not here in question, but from the point of view of their final end? Since every man has an immortal soul this is certain; therefore in a given traditional society this consideration can take precedence over that of diversity of qualifications. The immortality of the soul is the postulate of religious "egalitarianism", just as the quasi-divine character of the intellect—and hence of the intellectual elite—is the postulate of the caste system.

One could not imagine any greater divergence than that between the hierarchical system of Hinduism and the levelling outlook of Islam, yet there is here only a difference of emphasis, for truth is one: indeed, if Hinduism considers first of all in human nature those fundamental tendencies which divide men into so many hierarchical categories, it nevertheless realises equality in the super-caste of wandering monks, the *sannyāsīs*, in which social origin no longer plays any part. The case of the Christian clergy is similar in the sense that among them titles of nobility disappear: a peasant could not become a prince, but he could become Pope and crown an Emperor. Inversely, some form of hierarchy appears even in the most "egalitarian" religions: in Islam, where every man is his own priest, the Sherifs, descendants of the Prophet, form a religious nobility and are thus superimposed on the rest of society, though without assuming in it any exclusive function. In the Christian world a citizen of note might be ennobled, whereas in the Hindu system such a thing is altogether

excluded, because there the essential object of the higher castes is the "maintenance" of a primordial perfection; it is the "descending" sense given to the origin of castes that explains why caste can be lost but not acquired.<sup>1</sup> Indeed this perspective of "hereditary maintenance" is the very key to the caste system: it also explains the exclusiveness of admission to Hindu temples—the temples are not pulpits for preaching—and in a more general way the preponderant part played by rules of purity. The "obsession" of Hinduism is not the conversion of "unbelievers" but on the contrary the maintaining of a primordial purity which is as much intellectual as moral and ritual.

What are the fundamental tendencies of human nature to which castes are more or less directly related? They could be defined as so many different ways of envisaging an empirical "reality": in other words the fundamental tendency in a man is connected with his "feeling" or "consciousness" of what is "real". For the *brāhmaṇa*—the purely intellectual, contemplative and "sacerdotal" type—it is the changeless, the transcendent which is "real"; in his innermost heart he does not "believe" either in "life" or in "earth"; something in him remains foreign to change and to matter; broadly speaking such is his inner disposition—what might be called his "imaginative life"—whatever may be the personal weaknesses by which it is obscured. The *kṣatriya*—the "knightly" type—has a keen intelligence, but it is turned towards action and analysis rather than towards contemplation and synthesis; his strength lies especially in his character; he makes up for the aggressiveness of his energy by his generosity and for his

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<sup>1</sup> The late Pandit Hari Prasad Śāstri did, however, assure us that there could be exceptions to this rule quite apart from the possible reintegration of a family through successive marriages. He quoted the case of King Viśvāmitra. In that case one should no doubt take into account the quality of the cyclic period and the special conditions created by the proximity of an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu.

passionate nature by his nobility, self-control and greatness of soul. For this human type it is action that is "real", for it is by action that things are determined, modified and ordered; without action there is neither virtue nor honour nor glory. In other words the *kṣātriya* believes in the efficacy of action rather than in the fatedness of a given situation: he despises the slavery of facts and thinks only of determining their order, of clarifying a chaos, of cutting Gordian knots. Thus, just as for the *brāhmaṇa* all is changeful and unreal except the Eternal and whatever is attached to It—truth, knowledge, contemplation, ritual, the Way—so for the *kṣātriya* all is uncertain and peripheral except the constants of his *dharma*—action, honour, virtue, glory, nobility—on which for him all other values depend. This perspective can be transposed on to the religious plane without any essential change in its psychological quality.

For the *vaiśya*—the merchant, the peasant, the artisan, the man whose activities are directly bound up with material values not merely *de facto* and accidentally but by virtue of his inner nature—it is riches, security, prosperity and "well-being" that are "real"; in his instinctive life other values are secondary and in his innermost heart he does not "believe" in them; his imagination expands on the plane of economic stability, of the material perfection of work and the return it yields, and when this is transposed on to the religious plane it becomes exclusively a perspective of accumulating merit with a view to posthumous security. Externally this mentality is analogous to that of the *brāhmaṇa* by reason of its static and pacific character; but it is remote from the mentality both of the *brāhmaṇa* and the *kṣātriya* because of a certain pettiness of the intelligence and will<sup>1</sup>; the *vaiśya* is clever and possesses

<sup>1</sup> In the nineteenth century the bourgeois laity in Europe had for reasons of equilibrium to realise in their turn the qualities of the classes that had been eliminated; we are not referring here to the fact of belonging to the bourgeois class, which is in itself unimportant, but to the bourgeois spirit, which is quite a different thing. The preoccupation



common sense, but he lacks specifically intellectual qualities and also chivalrous virtues, "idealism" in the higher sense of the term. Here it must be repeated that we are speaking, not of "classes", but of "castes", or, to be more precise, of "natural castes", since institutions as such, though they may reproduce nature, are never wholly free from the imperfections and vicissitudes of all manifestation. One does not belong to some particular caste because one follows a certain profession and is the issue of certain parents, but, at any rate under normal conditions, one follows a particular profession because one belongs to a certain caste and the latter is largely—though not absolutely—guaranteed by heredity; at least this guarantee is sufficient to render the Hindu system possible. The system has never been able to exclude exceptions, which as such confirm the rule; the fact that the exceptions have attained the largest possible number in our days of over-population and of the "realisation of impossibilities" could not in any case vitiate the principle of hereditary hierarchy.

The "twice-born" (*dvija*), namely the three castes of which we have spoken, might be defined as a spirit endowed with a body, and the *śūdra*, who represents the fourth caste, as a body endowed with human consciousness; in fact the *śūdra* is the man who is properly qualified only for manual work of a more or less quantitative kind and not for work demanding greater initiative and more complex aptitudes; for

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with science in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, proves, not indeed that "humanity" has "progressed", but that the "intellectuality" of men of mercantile type is hardly able to rise above the level of mere facts. The current illusion that man can rejoin metaphysical realities by dint of scientific discoveries is quite characteristic of this heaviness of spirit and only goes to prove that, as Guénon wrote, "the rise of the *vaiśyas* spells intellectual night". Moreover "civilisation", without any qualifying epithet and taken as *the* civilisation, is a typically *vaiśya* concept, and this explains on the one hand the hatred now often felt for anything supposed to partake of "fanaticism" and on the other hand an element of pretentious kindness which is a deadly feature of the systematic oppression dealt out by the civilisation in question.

this human type, which is still more widely separated from the preceding types than is the *vaiśya* from the noble castes, it is bodily things that are "real"; it is eating and drinking which in this case strictly constitutes happiness, these and their psychological concomitances<sup>1</sup>; in the innate perspective of the *śūdra*, in his "heart", all that lies outside the realm of bodily satisfaction smacks of luxury, not to say of "illusion", or in any case seems something "alongside" of what his imagination takes for reality, namely the satisfaction of immediate physical needs. It might be objected that the knightly type is also one who enjoys, but this is not the point; here the question is above all the psychological function of enjoyment, the part it plays in an assemblage of compossibles; the *kṣatriya* readily turns poet or aesthete; he lays very little stress on matter as such. The central and at the same time elementary place held by enjoyment in the innate perspective of the *śūdra* explains his often care-free, dissipated and "momentary" character through which he rejoins, by a curious inverted analogy, the spiritual care-freeness of the man who is beyond caste (*atīvarṇāśrami*), the *sannyāsi* who likewise lives in the moment, does not think of the morrow and wanders without apparent object; but the *śūdra* is too passive in relation to matter to be able to govern himself and therefore remains dependent on a will other than his own; his virtue is fidelity, or a kind of massive rightness, no doubt dense but also simple and intelligible, and therefore also worthy of respect, a fact which is sometimes forgotten.

The qualities of *vaiśyas* are often confused with those of *brāhmaṇas* and *vice versa* for the simple reason that both these castes are peaceable; and in the same way *śūdras* are apt to be

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<sup>1</sup> The meaning which the words "reality" and "realism" have acquired for many of our contemporaries is highly significant; "reality" has become synonymous with banality and even triviality, and thus with ugliness and brutality; in such a "realism" there is no longer room for truth, nobility or beauty, for values, that is, which elude quantitative measurement.

confused with *kṣattriyas* because of the aspects of violence proper to them both; these errors are the more harmful inasmuch as we live in a civilisation that is half *vaiśya* and half *śūdra* the values of which render such confusions easy. In such a world it is impossible to reach an understanding of the *brāhmaṇa* without having first come to understand the values of the *kṣattriya*. If facile confusions and unwarrantable assimilations are to be avoided, it is essential to differentiate sharply and on every plane between higher and lower, conscious and unconscious, spiritual and material, qualitative and quantitative.

It now remains for us to consider the case of the man who is "lacking caste"; here again it is a natural type, a basic human tendency, that we have in mind and not merely the categories of the Hindu system as occurring in actual practice. We have seen that the typical *śūdra* can be opposed, because of his lack of real interest in what transcends his bodily life and the resulting lack of constructive aptitudes, to the three higher castes taken together; in a similar way the "outcaste", by reason of his chaotic character, can be opposed to all men of homogeneous character. One can say of him that he exhibits a tendency to realise those psychological possibilities which are excluded for others: hence his proneness to transgression; he finds his satisfaction in what others reject. According to the Hindu the extreme type of the casteless man—the *caṇḍāla* properly so called—is the offspring of a *śūdra* father and a *brāhmaṇi* mother; here the basic idea is that the maximum of impurity, or in other words of psychological dissonance due to congenital incompatibilities, arises from a maximum difference between the castes of the parents; the child of *śūdra* parents is "pure", thanks to their mental homogeneity, but the child born of the mixture of a *Śūdra* and a noble woman is "impure" in the exact measure of the superiority of the woman's caste over that of her husband.

In Christian countries, as almost everywhere else, an illegitimate child, the "fruit of sin", is in practice regarded as "impure"; from the Hindu standpoint, which is centred in a kind of organic purity, this initial sin is hereditary in the same way as to be noble born in Europe or "original sin" in the Christian perspective.<sup>1</sup> All things considered the pariah, whatever his ethnic origin and cultural background, constitutes a definite type which normally dwells on the fringe of society and exhausts those possibilities which no one else is willing to touch. When he has talents—and one might say he is then capable "of anything and of nothing"—he often appears equivocal, off balance and sometimes simian and

<sup>1</sup> "Illicit mingling of castes, marriages contrary to the rules and the omission of prescribed rites are the origin of the impure classes", says the *Mānava Dharma Śāstra* (X. 24). According to Śrī Rāmakrishna "the rules of caste are automatically effaced for the man who has reached perfection and realised the unity of all things; but as long as this sublime experience has not been obtained no one can avoid feeling superiority towards some and inferiority towards others, and all ought to observe distinctions of caste. If a man in this state of ignorance feigns perfection by trampling on caste distinctions and living without restraint, he is certainly like an unripe fruit that has been made to ripen artificially. . . . Those who invoke the Name of God become saints. Krishna Kishore was a saintly man of Ariadaha. One day he went on a pilgrimage to Vrindāvan. During his journey he became thirsty and, seeing a man near a well, asked him to draw a little water. The man excused himself, saying he was of a very low caste, being a cobbler and so unworthy to offer water to a brāhmin. Krishna Kishore then said to him: 'Purify yourself by pronouncing the Name of God! Say: Śiva! Śiva!' The man obeyed and then offered him water to drink and that orthodox brāhmin drank it! How great was his faith! . . . Caitanya and Nityānanda used to transmit the Name of Hari (the initiation into ritual invocation, *japa yoga*) to everyone including pariahs and embraced them all. A brāhmin without this love is no longer a brāhmin; a pariah with this love is no longer a pariah. Through *bhakti* an untouchable becomes pure and is raised up" (*L'Enseignement de Rāmakrishna*, published by J. Herbert). Here is an illustration of the particular virtue of *bhakti* with which we dealt in our *Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Faber and Faber). If account be taken of the inevitable difference between the principle of caste and its social and historical crystallisation it will readily be understood that an individual brāhmin may be intrinsically heretical—as were Dayānanda Saraswati and Rām Mohan Roy—and that a *vaiśya* may be a saint through Knowledge, as was Tiruvalluvar, who is venerated by brāhmins as such; inferiority can arise within the framework of superiority and *vice versa*.

Promethean; often he appears as a chimney sweep, acrobat, comedian or executioner, not to mention illicit occupations; in a word he shows a tendency either to follow bizarre or sinister activities or simply to neglect established rules; in this he resembles certain saints, though of course by inverse analogy. So far as "impure" or "contemptible" trades are concerned it might be thought hypocritical to abandon to certain men activities one is not willing to pursue oneself though one has need of them, but it must not be forgotten that society has a right to protect itself against tendencies which could be harmful to it and to neutralise them by exercising them through the intermediacy of men who in a measure embody them. As a "totality" society has "divine rights" which an individual as such—and inasmuch as he is a "part"—does not possess; in some cases the reverse is also true. An individual may refrain from condemning; society is obliged to condemn.

Even unvarying situations may, however, become attenuated with the passage of time: the casteless mass of India benefit from the cosmic law of compensation through having become so numerous and because of the resulting collective homogeneity; number itself acts as an absorbent substance, for the mass as such has something of the levelling innocence of earth; just as, according to Islamic esotericism, the flames of hell will in the end become cold, God being "essentially" and not "accidentally" good, so the congenital transgression of the pariah, his "impurity", must become attenuated at the end of the age and even completely reabsorbed in many cases, though without the heredity in which the individual remains a link or part<sup>1</sup> being on that account abolished. For these

<sup>1</sup> According to the *Mānava Dharma Śāstra*, "a man who belongs to a base class may be recognised by his actions. . . . The absence of noble feelings, coarseness of speech, cruelty (malice) and a forgetfulness of duties denote, here below, the man who owes his birth to a mother deserving of contempt". These criteria can clearly no longer be directly applied to

individuals the fact of being excluded from caste life is an aspect of *karma*—a consequence of “former actions”—exactly as is a disease or any other kind of misfortune for a member of a higher caste. On the other hand this same exclusion—a little like the condition of widows—has a certain religious value for the pariahs themselves, and this explains the refusal of most of them to escape from their condition by abandoning the Hindu world<sup>1</sup>; as a general rule such men are proud to belong to their particular pariah “caste”, this being true even of *caṇḍālas*.

Caste is the centre of gravity of the individual soul; the extreme pariah type is without centre and so lives in the

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the whole mass of the casteless any more than it can be said that all members of the higher castes possess the virtues appropriate to their respective *dharma*. It may be added that this aspect of the problem is independent of the question of temple entry; even if it be admitted that a certain social formalism may be suppressed by reason of new cyclic conditions, which is incontestable, such an easing of external forms would remain independent of any question of knowing whether pariahs should have access to brāhmin sanctuaries. A Hindu temple is something very different from a church or a mosque; it is not a place of obligatory services but the dwelling-place of a Divine Presence. The principle of ritual exclusion, with the unquestionable dogmatic rights it implies, is moreover known in all religions; one need only recall the Temple enclosure at Jerusalem and the iconostasis of Orthodox Christian churches.

<sup>1</sup> The Śaṅkarācārya of Kāñci has spoken of this as follows: “The caste system, while it took the role of a rigid discipline conducive to the general well-being of society, neutralised itself in the case of highly developed personages such as Nandanār the pariah Saint, or Dharma Vyadha, or Vidura of the Mahābhārata. Nandanār, even in his state of spiritual ecstasy, refused to enter the precincts of the temple, but felt exultant with the holy sight of the tower of the temple; but it was the Brāhmin of the temple who respected Nandanār as the Brāhmin of Brāhmins. . . . Diversity of *ācāras*, including food, marriage, etc., has a purpose which in the end profits the whole of humanity. . . . The Śūdra did sternly refuse to allow a Brāhmaṇa or a Kṣatriya to live in his house and a Caṇḍāla would stubbornly resist a Brāhmin’s entrance into his quarters and, if a Brāhmin happened to enter his locality even accidentally, the Caṇḍālas of the locality would go through some purificatory ceremonies. This indicates that the responsibility for the preservation of the respective disciplinary *ācāras* of any caste did not lie with the concerned caste alone but was a collective one that lay with every component part of the society at large.” (Our Spiritual Crisis: *The Hindu*, July 1956).

periphery and in inversion; if he tends to transgression, that is because in a sense it lends him the centre he lacks and thus in an illusory way frees him from his equivocal nature. His is a decentralised subjectivity, centrifugal and without recognised limits; he flees from the law, the norm, because that would bring him back to the centre which by his very nature he avoids. The *śūdra* type is also "subjective", but this subjectivity is opaque and homogeneous and bound to the body which is an objective reality; the *śūdra* has the quality, and also the defect, of being "solid". This can also be expressed as follows: the *brāhmaṇa* is "objective" and centred in "spirit"; the *kṣatriya* tends towards "spirit", but in a "subjective" way; the *vaiśya* is "objective" on the plane of "matter"; the *śūdra* is "subjective" on that same plane. The first three castes—the "twice-born" of Hinduism—are therefore distinguished from the *śūdra* either by "spirit" or by "objectivity"; only the *śūdra* combines "matter" with "subjectivity". Like the *śūdra* the *vaiśya* is a materialist, but his is a materialism of wider interests; like the *brāhmaṇa* the *kṣatriya* is an "idealist", but his "idealism" is more or less worldly or egocentric.

The lower caste not only lacks the mentality of the higher, but cannot even conceive of it exactly; besides, few things are more painful than "psychological" interpretations which attribute to the superior man intentions he could never possibly entertain. Such opinions merely reflect the small-mindedness of their authors, as can be observed *ad nauseam* in "historical criticism" or in "the science of religions"; men whose souls are fragmented and opaque pretend that they can instruct us in the "psychology" of greatness and of the sacred.

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It was stated at the outset that the system of castes is based on the nature of things, that is to say on certain natural properties of humankind of which it is a traditional

application<sup>1</sup>; now, as always happens in such a case, the traditional system "creates"—or helps to create—those very factors of which it is itself an application. The Hindu system results from spiritual or intellectual differences and at the same time creates types that are all the more sharply differentiated; whether this is an advantage or a disadvantage or both at once, it is a fact and an unavoidable fact at that. In the same way, where there is a traditional absence of castes, the latter perspective not only derives from the real absence of differentiation between men but also actualises it, that is to say, it eliminates in a certain sense those factors which, in the opposite perspective, give rise to the system of castes. In Islam, where there is no priestly caste either in an hereditary or in a vocational sense, every man has in him something of the priest and none is wholly a layman or is even describable as "the common man". To take another example, it can be said that, if every Moslem is "something of a priest", every Red Indian is "something of a prophet", at least in certain set conditions and by reason of the particular structure of the Red Indian tradition which distributes the prophetic quality throughout the collectivity, though without thereby abolishing the prophetic function properly so called. If any one were minded to reproach Hinduism for having "created" the pariah, the West could just as well be reproached for "creating" sin, since here as elsewhere the concept contributes to realising the thing itself by virtue of a concomitance that is inevitable in the case of any formal crystallisation.

If Westerners have difficulty in understanding the caste system it is, however, chiefly because they underestimate the law of heredity, and this for the very simple reason that it has become more or less inoperative in an environment so chaotic

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<sup>1</sup> Gandhi pointed out that "the caste system . . . is inherent in human nature, and Hinduism has simply made a science of it." (*Young India*).



as is the modern West where almost everyone aspires to climb the social ladder—if indeed such a ladder can still be said to exist—and hardly anyone follows his father's calling. A century or two of such conditions have been enough to render heredity highly precarious and unstable, and all the more so since heredity was not in the past turned to account by any system as strict as that of the Hindu castes; but even where crafts transmitted from father to son did exist, machines have practically abolished heredity. To this must be added, on the one hand, the virtual elimination of the nobility and, on the other, the creation of new "elites"; the most disparate and "opaque" elements have turned themselves into "intellectuals" with the result that, as Guénon would have said, hardly anyone is any longer "in his proper place"; nor is there anything surprising in the fact that "metaphysical knowledge" has now come to be envisaged in accordance with the perspective of *vaiśyas* and *śūdras*, a change which no amount of clap-trap about "culture" can conceal.

The problem of castes leads to an ancillary question: how is the position or quality of the modern industrial worker to be defined? In the first place the answer is that "the world of the workers" is a wholly artificial creation due to machines and the popular diffusion of scientific information connected with their use; in other words machines infallibly create the artificial human type called "proletarian", or rather they create a proletariat, for here it is essentially a question of a quantitative collectivity and not of a natural caste, a caste, that is, based on a particular individual nature. If machines could be suppressed and the ancient crafts restored with all their aspects of art and dignity, the "problem of the workers" would cease to exist; this is true even as regards purely servile functions or more or less quantitative occupations for the simple reason that machines are in themselves inhuman and anti-spiritual. Machines kill not only the soul of the worker,

but the soul as such and so also the soul of the exploiter: the co-existence of exploiter and worker is inseparable from mechanisation; the crafts by their human and spiritual quality prevent this gross alternative. Mechanisation of the world, after all, means the triumph of ponderous and treacherous iron-mongery; it is the victory of metal over wood, of matter over man, of cunning over intelligence<sup>1</sup>; expressions such as "mass", "block" and "shock" that occur so commonly in the vocabulary of industrialised man, are very significant in a world more proper to termites than to humans. There is nothing surprising in the fact that the "workers' world", with its mechanico-scientific and materialistic psychology, is particularly impermeable to spiritual realities, for it presupposes a "surrounding reality" which is quite artificial: it requires machinery and therefore metal, din, hidden and treacherous forces, a nightmare environment, incomprehensible comings and goings—in a word an insect-like existence carried on in the midst of ugliness and triviality. In such a world, or rather in such a "stage set," spiritual reality comes to be regarded as an all too obvious illusion or a luxury to be despised. In no matter what traditional environment, on the contrary, it is the "problem of the workers", and so also of mechanisation, which is devoid of persuasive force: in order to make it convincing a stage world corresponding to it had first to be created, in which the very forms suggested the absence of God; Heaven had to be made to seem improbable and any talk of God to sound false<sup>2</sup>. When the industrial worker says

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<sup>1</sup> Somewhere we have read that only the advances in technology can explain the new and catastrophic character of the first world war, and this is very true. Here it is machines that have made history, just as elsewhere they are making men, ideas and an entire world.

<sup>2</sup> The great mistake of those who in Europe seek to lead the industrial masses back to the fold of the Church is that they confirm the worker in his "dehumanisation" by accepting the world of machines as a real and legitimate world and even believing themselves obliged to "love that world for its own sake". To translate the Gospels into slang or to travesty the

he has no time to pray he is not far wrong, for in this way he is merely expressing what is inhuman or, one might say, sub-human in his condition. The ancient crafts were eminently intelligible and did not deprive man of his human quality, which by definition implies the opportunity to think of God. Some will doubtless object that industrialism is a fact and must be accepted as such, as though the character of being a fact took precedence over truth. People easily mistake for courage and realism what is their exact opposite: that is to say, because some calamity cannot be prevented, people call it a "benefit" and make a virtue of their own inability to escape from it. Error is deemed truth simply because it exists and this fits in well with the dynamism and existentialism of the mentality of a machine age; everything that exists, thanks to the blindness of men, is called "our time", just as if this fact by itself constituted a categorical imperative. It is all too clear that the impossibility of escaping from an ill does not prevent that ill from being what it is; in order to find a remedy it is necessary to consider the ill quite apart from our chance of escape or our desire not to perceive it, for no good can arise in opposition to truth.

There is a common mistake, and one characteristic of the positivist or existentialist mentality of our times, which consists in believing that the establishing of a fact depends on knowing its causes or the remedies for it as the case may be, as if man had not a right to see things he can neither explain nor modify; people call it barren criticism merely to point out an evil and they forget that the first step towards an ultimate cure is to establish the nature of the disease. In any case

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Holy Family in the guise of proletarians is to make a mock not only of religion but of the workers themselves; it is in any case base demagoguery or, let us say, weakmindedness, for all these attempts betray the inferiority complex of "intellectuals" when they meet the sort of "brutal realism" characteristic of the industrial worker. This realism becomes the more easy the more its field is limited, gross and so also unreal.

every situation offers the possibility, if not of an objective solution, at least of a subjective evaluation, a liberation by the spirit; whoever fathoms the real nature of machinery will at the same time escape from psychological enslavement to machines, and this is already a great gain. We say this without any optimism and without losing sight of the fact that the present world is a "necessary evil" the metaphysical root of which in the last analysis is to be sought in the infinity of Divine Possibility.

There is yet another common objection to be reckoned with: some will say there have always been machines and that the nineteenth century merely introduced more perfect machines, but this argument contains a radical error. It arises from a lack of any feeling for "dimensions" or, to put it in another way, from an inability to distinguish between qualitative and "eminent" differences and those which are quantitative or accidental. The old looms, for example, even when highly perfected, are a kind of revelation and a symbol which by its intelligibility allows the soul to breathe, whereas a mechanised loom is suffocating for the man who serves it; the genesis of the craft of weaving goes with spiritual life—as also appears from its aesthetic quality—whilst a modern machine on the contrary presupposes a mental climate and a labour of research incompatible with sanctity, not to speak of its resemblance to some giant arthropod or to a magic box, a fact which also counts as a criterion. A saint might indeed construct or perfect a wind-mill or a water-mill, but no saint could invent a machine, precisely because technical progress of this kind implies a mentality alien to spirituality, and this criterion shows up with brutal clarity, as has just been said, in the very forms of mechanical constructions.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Attempts which, in antiquity and in the Middle Ages, came nearest to mechanical inventions were those that served chiefly for amusement and were regarded as curiosities and thus as things which became legitimate by very reason of their exceptional character. The ancients were

It must be emphasised that in the realm of forms, as in that of spirit, everything is false which is not consonant either with virgin nature or with a sanctuary; everything legitimate is connected with nature on the one hand and with the sacred on the other. One striking characteristic of machines is that they feed insatiably on materials, these being often of a tellurian and darksome character, instead of being set in motion by man alone or by some natural force such as wind or water; in order to keep them "alive" man is forced to resort to a wholesale stripping of the earth, and this is not the least aspect of their function of disequilibrium. A man must be blind indeed not to see that neither speed nor over-production are benefits, not to mention the reducing of the people to a proletariat and the disfigurement of the world.<sup>1</sup> But the basic argument remains the one first mentioned: such technology can only be born in a world without God, a world in which ingenuity has taken the place of intelligence and contemplation.

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After this digression let us return to our fundamental theme: it is easy for an Occidental to understand how the equality of men before God springs from the very nature of things, and all the more so since the monotheistic religions—and Buddhism too—by their very structure neutralise the inconveniences which can result from human inequalities; the fact that, while they accept these on the lay or worldly plane, they also create religious hierarchies, in no way impairs their fundamental perspective. Some may ask themselves why,

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not like feckless children who handle anything within reach, but on the contrary like men of ripe judgment who avoid certain orders of possibilities the disastrous consequences of which they foresee.

<sup>1</sup> Doubtless some would refuse us the moral right to make use of modern inventions, as if the economic structure and rhythms of our period would allow one to escape from these inventions or as if it were useful for one man to escape when no one else is able to do so. This refusal would moreover only be logical if they for their part restored to us all those values which the modern world has destroyed.

granted that such a "levelling" is spiritually possible, Hinduism could not adopt the same point of view and abandon caste; now Hinduism as such, in other words as a totality, has neither the right nor the power to do this, since it goes without saying that, if a sacred institution exists, that is because it is metaphysically possible and therefore necessary, and this implies that it offers advantages which could not be realised otherwise.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the pure and direct character of Vedāntic metaphysic would be inconceivable apart from the caste system; in India the most transcendent intellectuality enjoys complete liberty, whereas in other traditions this same intellectuality has to accommodate itself to an esotericism that is more or

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<sup>1</sup> Moreover the caste system proves its legitimacy by its results: "We do not think" wrote a missionary on the subject of the brāhmins, "that there exists in the world an aristocratic family or even a royal family which has defended itself so pitilessly against every contagion, every missalliance, every physical or moral taint. That is why, personally speaking, we cannot conceal the fact that our contact with this splendid caste has left us truly dazzled and, from the bottom of our heart, profoundly sympathetic. . . . To the prestige of plastic beauty the brāhmin visibly unites that of intelligence. Especially is he gifted for the abstract sciences, for philosophy, and above all for mathematics. A man who on this score is certainly one of the most celebrated in South India, being a member of the higher council of professors of the Madras University, the Rev. Father Honoré, declared to us that the average level of the countless brāhmin pupils he had taught during half a century as a teacher was far above, not only the average, but even the highest category of students in European universities", (Pierre Llande: *L'Inde Sacrée*). "There is no doubt that caste (sub-castes of *vaiśyas* and *śūdras* are meant here) offers many advantages to its members. It makes their work as easy, agreeable and honourable as possible; it excludes competitions properly so called, distributes a given quantity of work among the largest possible number of available persons, looks after them in case of unemployment and defends their interests by the most varied means. . . . On the other hand the fact that a profession is transmitted from father to son in many respects guarantees the quality of the work; through his heredity a man reaches an almost organic qualification for a particular activity such as it would be difficult to realise in any other way; at the same time technical secrets are handed on which enable craftsmen to produce masterpieces with most primitive means. Lastly the caste system greatly contributed to the stabilisation of Hindu society and the preservation of its civilisation. . ." (H. von Glasenapp: *Der Hinduismus*).

less sybilline or even "tortuous" in its formulations and often also to certain sentimental restraints; this is the price paid for simplification of the social order. In the Semitic religions esotericism is closely bound up with exotericism and *vice versa*; the absence of castes imposes a certain mental uniformity which, from the point of view of pure metaphysic, offers disadvantages not less than those the caste system offers from the point of view of the imponderables of human nature; the exotericism is very apt to trespass on the esotericism and this leads to an oscillation between these two planes to which a man like Omar Khayyam, an orthodox Sūfi, replied by paradox and irony.<sup>1</sup> Where there exists a sharply defined exotericism, esotericism can hardly avoid "walking on exoteric stilts", although in reality it represents the essence of truth which transcends and incidentally shatters forms, as is shown by a case like that of Al-Hallaj, a "lover" of God whom the Hindus would assuredly not have condemned. It must not be forgotten that a collectivity represents a principle tending to increase density and complexity; it is always ready to lend an absolute character to facts, and this is the tendency for which religious dogmatism makes allowance from the outset. If esotericism can infuse into the mass something of its mysteries and graces, the mass in return lends it—in the same proportion as esotericism gives itself to the mass—its own tendencies to both "density" and "dissipation"; from this there arises a doctrinal simplification and a need for external activities which are the very antipodes of intellection and contemplation. For example, in Islam four levels must be distinguished: first there is exotericism as such, the *shari'ah*, which includes those ideas and means proper to its nature; then there is esotericism, *haqiqah* or *taṣawwuf*, dwelling under cover of the exotericism and comprising whatever

<sup>1</sup> If religious hypocrisy is an inevitable fact, the contrary must also be possible, namely wisdom and virtue hiding under appearances of scandal. Among the Muslim *malamatīyah* (=the "men of blame") an attitude of this kind even forms part of their method.

exoteric elements it has been able or even compelled to assimilate, the division between the two levels not being absolute; but such assimilation always remains a personal and mystical matter and in no way affects the sacred law. Then there is the inverse situation where the exoteric perspective infiltrates into the esotericism through a partial popularisation that is historically inevitable; this is a perspective of activity and of merit, of fear and of zeal combined with esoteric ideas<sup>1</sup>; finally there is an "esotericism within esotericism", if such an expression is possible, which is nothing other than gnosis disengaged, not indeed from all form, but from all internal formalism and all mythological absolutism.

As for the positive aspects of Moslem "levelling", Islam not only neutralised differences of caste, it also did away with racial oppositions. Perhaps no other civilisation has mingled races so much as the Islamic one: in general the mulatto appears in Islam as a perfectly "pure" and honourable element, not as the pariah he is in practice among peoples of Christian origin; it could be said that for the Muslim the turban or fez is what a white skin is for a European. For Islam the determinations of nature are accidents; slavery is an accident and therefore has no relation to any caste system; humanity was originally without castes and without races; this is what Islam wants to restore in conformity with the conditions of our millennium.<sup>2</sup> In Christianity and Buddhism the

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<sup>1</sup> It cannot be denied, for instance, that the Sūfism of Al-Ghazali includes a popular aspect which, though providential in its way, necessitates new inward adjustments.

<sup>2</sup> The Prophet, after his victorious entry into Mecca, made the following declarations: "God has removed from you the pride of paganism and pride of ancestry; you all descend from Adam and Adam was dust. God said: 'Oh men, We have created you from a single man and a single woman, and We have divided you into peoples and tribes in order that you might know yourselves; he is the most honoured of God who fears God the most'." The Caliph Ali expressed it thus: "Nobility is derived from high qualities and not from the mouldering bones of ancestors." What Islam wants to restore is, to be more precise, the religion of



situation is similar: any man of sound mind can become a priest or monk; the clergy correspond to a vocational caste, not an hereditary one like the nobility, but the absence of an hereditary character is in many cases compensated by celibacy. We have already hinted at the fact that, subject to celibacy, Hinduism would admit that in principle a non-brāhmin could become a brāhmin by virtue of his individual aptitude and his vocation, for the risk of negative atavisms would then be eliminated; something of the kind does in fact exist in the state of the *atīvarṇāśrami*, who is beyond the castes but only on the condition of withdrawing his person from the living body of society. The fact that there are some orders of *sannyāsis* which admit only brāhmins in no wise hinders any man from becoming a *sannyāsi* outside one of these orders. It should also be noted that three of the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu, namely Rāma, Kṛṣṇa and the Buddha, were *kṣattriyas* and not *brāhmaṇas*, though clearly they must have possessed the brāhminical nature in the highest degree; here can be seen a manifestation of universality as well as a compensation, for God, in His direct and flashing manifestations, is certainly not subject to pre-existing frameworks; His infinitude would forbid it.

To forestall any misinterpretation it is important here to note that the absence of proper castes in Islam, and even in most non-Hindu traditions, has nothing to do with a "humanitarian" attitude in the current sense, and this for the simple reason that the point of view of tradition is that of the global interest of human beings, not just of what is pleasant; it has no use for a pseudo-charity that saves bodies but kills souls.<sup>1</sup>

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Abraham, the primordial form of the Semitic current and thus an image of the primordial tradition in its absolute sense, the tradition of the "Golden Age".

<sup>1</sup> The Gospels say: "Fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul" and, again, "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" We certainly have no wish to criticise genuine charity such as springs from a total and not from a

Tradition is centred on what gives meaning to life, not on an immediate "welfare" that is partial and ephemeral and conceived as an end in itself; it does not deny the relative and conditional legitimacy of such welfare but subordinates all values to the final ends of man. Unfortunately spiritual welfare is for most men not compatible with a too complete earthly welfare; human nature has need of trials as well as consolations. A particular individual, whether rich or poor, may be sober and detached by his own will, but a collectivity is not an individual nor is it endowed with a single will; it always has something of the nature of an avalanche held in check and it only maintains its balance with the help of restrictions.

Those hereditary virtues which strike us in some particular ethnic group are in fact preserved only thanks to a continual struggle, whatever may be the plane on which this is carried on; after all, the struggle itself forms part of happiness provided it keeps close to nature, which is maternal, and does not become abstract and treacherous. On the other hand it must not be forgotten that "welfare" is by definition something relative; once an exclusively material point of view is adopted the normal balance between spirit and body is destroyed and appetites are unleashed which carry with them no limiting factor. It is this aspect of human nature which humanitarians, in the usual sense of the term, either deny or

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fragmentary vision of man and of the world: what is culpable is the exaggerated (and specifically modern) humanitarianism founded on the error that "the totality of all living beings is the Personal God. . . . Provided I can adore and serve the only God that exists, the sum total of all souls" (Vivekânanda). This philosophy is doubly false, first, because it denies God by decisively altering the notion of the Divine and, secondly, because it deifies the world and thus restricts charity to the most external level; one cannot see God in one's neighbour if one starts by reducing the Divine to the human. Nothing then remains but the illusion of "doing good", of being indispensable, coupled with contempt for those who "do nothing" even if they are saints whose presence sustains the world.

studiously ignore. They believe man to be good in himself, good apart from God, and arbitrarily lay his defects at the door of unfavourable material conditions, as if experience did not prove, not merely that human malice need not depend on any external factor, but that it often develops in a state of "welfare" sheltered from all elementary cares; this the deviations of "bourgeois culture" exemplify *ad nauseam*. For the religions the "economic norm" is expressly the state of poverty, in which the Founders have moreover always set the example—here it is a question of a poverty that sticks close to nature, not of a denudation rendered unintelligible and hideous by the servitudes of an artificial and irreligious world; as for riches, they are tolerated because they are a natural right and exclude neither detachment nor sobriety—no one is compelled to be a saint,—but they are never regarded as the ideal they have in practice become in the modern world.

In this respect Hinduism is particularly strict: according to the *Śāstras* luxury in the proper sense, luxury which envisages only physical well-being and keeps adding to it fresh needs, is a "theft from nature"; its opposite, simplicity, clearly means, not a privation of what is necessary, but a refusal of whatever is superfluous from the point of view of physical need, not a rejection of property as such; though it is true that this stage of simplicity is exceeded in India itself, as elsewhere, and has been so for many centuries. In any case people today far too readily include under the common denomination of "want" or "misery" both an ancestral simplicity of life and mere lack of food, and the continual confusing of these two things is far from unbiassed; the catchword "under-developed countries" is from this point of view highly significant in its blatant perfidy. A scientific machine-age "standard of living" has been invented and the aim is to impose

this on all peoples<sup>1</sup>, above all on those who are classed as "backward" whether they be Hindus or Hottentots. For these believers in progress happiness means a host of noisy and ponderous complications calculated to crush out many elements of beauty and so also of well-being; when they want to abolish such and such "fanaticisms" and "horrors" these people forget that there are also atrocities on the spiritual plane and that the so-called humanitarian civilisation of the moderns is saturated with them.

In order to be able to judge of the quality of happiness in some past state of the world one would have to be able to put oneself in the place of the men who lived in it and adopt their way of evaluating things and so also their imaginative and sentimental reflexes; many things to which we have become accustomed would seem to them intolerable restraints to which they would prefer the more familiar risks; just the ugliness and the atmosphere of triviality of the world of today would seem to them like the worst of nightmares. History as such cannot give a full account of the soul of some distant epoch: it chiefly registers calamities, leaving aside all the static factors of happiness; it has been said that happiness has no history, and this is profoundly true. Wars and epidemics no more reflect than do certain customs the happy aspects of the lives of our ancestors, while their literary and artistic works plainly do so. Even if one supposes that history could tell one nothing about the happiness of the Middle Ages, the cathedrals and other artistic manifestations of the mediaeval world provide an indisputable witness to that happiness in the sense that (to put it at its

<sup>1</sup> The Śāṅkarācārya of Kāñcī has pointed out in the text already quoted that "the very idea of raising the standard of living . . . will have the most injurious effects on society. Raising the standard of living means tempting people to encumber themselves with more luxuries and thus leading them ultimately to real poverty in spite of increased production. *Aparigraha* meant that every man should take from nature only so much as is required for his life in this world."

lowest) they do not give the impression of a humanity more unhappy than that of today; like the Orientals of old the ancestors of the present Europeans would no doubt have preferred, given the choice, to be unhappy after their own fashion than happy after ours. There is nothing human which is not an evil from some point of view: even tradition itself is in certain respects an "evil", since it must handle evil things in man and these human ills invade it in their turn, but it is then a lesser evil and, humanly speaking, it would obviously be far truer to call it a "good". The pure truth is that "God alone is good" and that every earthly thing has some ambiguous side to it.

No doubt some will say that humanitarianism, far from being materialistic by definition, aims at reforming human nature by education and legislation; now it is contradictory to want to reform the human outside the divine since the latter is the essence of the former; to make the attempt is in the end to bring about miseries far worse than those from which one was trying to escape. Philosophical humanitarianism under-estimates the immortal soul just because it over-estimates the human animal; it compels people even to denigrate saints that they may the better be able to whitewash criminals; the one seems unable to go without the other. From this results oppression of those of contemplative bent from their most tender years: in the name of egalitarianism vocations are blurred and geniuses are worn down, by schools in particular and by official worldliness in general; every spiritual element is banished from professional and public life <sup>1</sup> and this amounts to removing from life a great part of its content and condemning religion to a slow death. The modern levelling—which

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<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, by a kind of compensation, professional life more and more assumes a "religious" air in the sense that it claims the whole of man, his soul as well as his time, as though the sufficient reason for the human condition were some economic enterprise and not immortality.

may call itself "democratic"—is the very opposite of the theocratic equality of the monotheistic religions, for it is founded, not on the theomorphism of man, but on his animality and his rebellion. Besides, the thesis of indefinite progress comes up against the following contradiction: if man has been able to exist for thousands of years while under the domination of errors and stupidities—always supposing that the traditions are merely such, in which case the error and stupidity would be well-nigh measureless—the immensity of this deception would be incompatible with the intelligence with which man as such is credited and with which he must be credited. In other words, if man is intelligent enough to arrive at the "progress" which our period embodies—assuming there is any reality in such progress—then man must have been *a priori* too intelligent to remain for thousands of years the dupe of errors as ridiculous as those which modern "progressivism" attributes to him; and if he is on the contrary stupid enough to have believed in them so long, then he must also be too stupid to escape from them. Again, if present day man had at long last arrived at truth, he would have to be proportionately superior to the men of former times, and the disproportion between the two would be well-nigh absolute. Now the least that can be said is that the men of ancient or mediaeval times were neither less intelligent nor less virtuous than modern man. The ideology of progress is one of those absurdities that are as remarkable for the lack of imagination as for the total lack of sense of proportion they display; this is, moreover, essentially a *vaiśya* illusion, rather like that of "culture", which is nothing more than intellectuality stripped of intelligence.

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To return now to the question of castes: an absence of castes in an external sense—for, at least in certain respects, natural castes can only be annulled in sanctity—requires

conditions which will neutralise the possible disadvantages of such lack of social differentiation; in particular it requires a code of manners to safeguard the spiritual liberty of every man; by this is meant, not liberty for error, which obviously has no spiritual character, but liberty for a life in God. Such a code of manners is the very negation of an egalitarian levelling down, for it concerns what is highest in us: men are enjoined to dignity and should treat one another as potential saints; to bow to one's neighbour is to see God everywhere and to open oneself to God. The opposite attitude is the "camaraderie" which denies one's neighbour all mystery and even any right to mystery; it means putting oneself on the level of human animality and reducing one's neighbour to that same level, forcing him into a stifling and subhuman flatness. An absence of social differences can only exist on a religious basis: it can function only from above, first by attaching man to God and then by recognising the presence of God in man. In a civilisation such as Islam there are, strictly speaking, no "social strata"; the rules of good conduct form part of religion and it is enough to be pious in order to know them; a poor man therefore feels at ease among the rich, the more so since religion is "on his side", poverty, viewed as a state, being a perfection; nor is a rich man shocked by any lack of "culture" or education among the poor, for there is no "culture" apart from the tradition and its point of view is moreover never quantitative. In other words the poor man can be an "aristocrat" beneath his rags, whereas in the West it is "civilisation" which prevents this. It is true that one may meet peasant aristocrats even in present-day Europe, especially in the Mediterranean countries, but they give the impression of being survivals from another age; the modern levelling everywhere destroys the beauties of religious equality, for, the one being a caricature of the other, they are incompatible.

Caste, as we understand it, has in essence two aspects, one of "degree" and the other of "mode" of intelligence, a distinction due, not to the essence of intellect, but to accidents of its manifestation. Intelligence may be contemplative or inquiring, intuitive or discursive, direct or indirect; it may be simply inventive or constructive; or it may amount to no more than elementary commonsense; in each of these modes there are degrees so that one man may be more "intelligent" than another yet inferior to him in his mode of intelligence. In other words intelligence may be centred on the intellect, which is transcendent and infallible in its essence, or on reason, which has no direct perception of transcendent realities and consequently could not provide a guarantee against a passionate element intruding into thought; reason may be to a greater or lesser extent determined by the intellect, but it may also be limited to things of practical life or even to life's most immediate and rudimentary aspects. Now, as has already been explained, the caste system derives essentially from a perspective of intelligence and so of intellectuality and metaphysical knowledge, hence the spirit of exclusiveness and purity so characteristic of the Hindu tradition.

The equality, or rather the absence of differentiation, realised by Buddhism, Islam and other traditions is related to the pole of "existence" rather than to that of "intelligence"; existence, the being of things, neutralises and unites, intelligence discerns and separates. Existence is by its very nature a "standing out" (*ex-sistere*, *ex-stare*) from Unity and thus is the plane of separation, whereas intelligence, being Unity by its own intrinsic nature, is the ray leading back to the Principle. Both existence and intelligence unite and divide, but each does so in a different relationship, so that intelligence divides where existence unites and *vice versa*. This could be put in another way: for Buddhism—which does not expressly "deny" the castes but rather "ignores" them—all men are



public, which she could not do.<sup>1</sup> From another angle woman assumes, face to face with man, an aspect of Divinity: her nobility, compounded of beauty and of virtue, is for man like a revelation of his own infinite essence and so of what he "would wish to be" because that is what he "is".

Finally we want to touch on a certain connection between the actualisation of castes and sedentary conditions of existence: it is an undeniable fact that the lower types are less frequently found among warrior nomads than among sedentary peoples; an adventurous and heroic nomadism results in the qualitative differences becoming as it were submerged in a generalised nobility; the materialist and servile type is kept in abeyance and in compensation the priestly type does not become completely distinct from the chivalric type. According to the conceptions of these peoples human quality—"nobility"—is maintained by a fighting mode of life: no virtue, they say, without virile and therefore perilous activity; man becomes vile when he ceases to look suffering and death in the face; it is impassiveness which makes a man; it is events, or, if you will, adventure which makes life. This perspective explains the attachment of these peoples—Bedouins, Tuaregs, Red Indians and ancient Mongols—to their ancestral nomadic or semi-nomadic condition and the contempt they feel for sedentary folk and especially for town-dwellers; the deepest evils from which humanity is suffering do in fact come out of the great urban agglomerations and not out of virgin nature.<sup>2</sup>

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In the cosmos all things show at the same time an aspect of simplicity and an aspect of complexity and in every sphere

<sup>1</sup> In the framework of a traditional Christian world.

<sup>2</sup> A certain easing of the Hindu system among the Balinese can be explained by facts qualitatively analogous to nomadism, namely their insular isolation and the necessarily restricted number of the inhabitants; also the Balinese show a proud and independent character which makes them akin to the nomads.

there are perspectives related to either the one or the other of these aspects; synthesis and analysis alike are in the nature of things, and this is true of human societies as of other orders; it is therefore impossible that castes should be found nowhere or that they should nowhere be absent. Strictly speaking Hinduism has no "dogmas", in the sense that in it every concept may be denied provided the argument is intrinsically true; but this absence of "irremovable dogmas" in the strict sense at the same stroke prevents social unification. What makes such unification possible, in particular in the monotheistic religions, is precisely dogma which serves as a transcendent Knowledge accessible to all. If to the majority of men Knowledge as such is inaccessible, it yet imposes itself on all in the form of faith, so that the "believer" is something like a "virtual" or "symbolical" *brāhmaṇa*. The exclusiveness of the *brāhmaṇa* in regard to the other castes is repeated, *mutatis mutandis*, in the exclusiveness of the "believer" in regard to "unbelievers" or to those not of the "faithful"; in both cases it is "Knowledge" which excludes, whether it be a matter of hereditary aptitude for pure Knowledge or the fact of a symbolical and virtual knowledge, that is to say a religious belief. But both in the case of a revealed faith and in that of an instituted caste the exclusion—conditional and "offensive" in the former case and unconditional and "defensive" in the latter—may be only "formal" and not "essential", for every saint is a "believer" whatever his religion and a "brāhmin" whatever his caste. It should perhaps be made clear as regards dogmas that the doctrinal pillars of Hinduism are in part "mobile dogmas"; they lose their absolute quality at higher levels while preserving it unshakeably on the level to which they relate, outside all question of legitimate divergences of perspective. But in all this no door is left open to intrinsic error, for otherwise the tradition would lose the very reason for its existence. Once we discern between true and false, "heresy"

becomes possible, whatever may be our own reaction to it; it corresponds on the level of ideas to material error on the level of facts.

Caste in its spiritual sense is the "law" or *dharma* governing a particular category of men in accord with their qualifications. It is in this sense, and only in this sense, that the *Bhagavad-Gītā* says: "Better for each one is his own law of action, even if it be imperfect, than the law of another, even well applied. It is better to perish in one's own law; it is perilous to follow the law of another" (III, 35).<sup>1</sup> And similarly the *Mānava-Dharma Śāstra* says: "It is better to carry out one's own proper functions in a defective manner than to fulfil perfectly those of another; for he who lives accomplishing the duties of another caste forthwith loses his own." (X, 97).

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<sup>1</sup> The *Bhagavad-Gītā* cannot mean that every individual must, when he meets a traditional teaching, follow his personal opinions and tastes, otherwise Hinduism, which is a tradition, would long ago have ceased to exist.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE MEANING OF RACE

CASTE takes precedence over race because spirit has priority over form; race is a form while caste is a spirit. Even Hindu castes, which were in origin purely Indo-European, cannot be limited to a single race: there are Tamil, Balinese and Siamese brāhmins.<sup>1</sup> It is not possible, however, to hold that race is something devoid of meaning apart from physical characteristics, for, if it be true that formal constraints have nothing absolute about them, forms must none the less have their own sufficient reason; if races are not castes<sup>2</sup>, they must all the same correspond to human differences of another order, rather as differences of style may express equivalence in the spiritual order whilst also marking divergencies of mode.

Thus the thinking of a White man—whether a Westerner or an Oriental—is incisive and animated like his idioms and his facial features; one might say that there is something “auditory” about it, whereas the thinking of men of the Yellow race has a more or less “visual” character<sup>3</sup> and works by discontinuous strokes. The spirit of the Far East may be

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<sup>1</sup> The Siamese brāhmins are a survival of Brāhminism in the midst of a Buddhist civilisation.

<sup>2</sup> This is true at any rate of the major races, white, yellow and black, and of intermediary races such as the Redskins, the Malayo-Polynesians, the Dravidians and the dark-skinned Hamites; but it is always possible for quite small racial groupings to coincide broadly speaking with castes.

<sup>3</sup> Chinese writing, which is the most important script in the case of the Yellow races and was conceived by them alone, is essentially “visual” and not “auditive”; it conveys pictures and not sounds.

called both static and aerial; its conciseness is compensated by symbolical quality and its dryness by intuitive delicacy. The languages of white peoples, whether they be Hamito-Semitic or Aryan, are inflected and move in mental arabesques, productive of long, heavy, incisive phrases. Those of yellow peoples, whether they be agglutinative or monosyllabic, disdain what we call "eloquence" and their mode of expression is sober and often elliptical; here beauty is lyrical rather than dramatic, for the yellow man lives in nature—in the visible and spatial—rather than in the human and temporal; his poetry is anchored in virgin nature and has no Promethean quality.<sup>1</sup>

The mental processes of the yellow man are, in a sense, like his face, and, as was said above, the same is true of the white man and also of the black man. The negro race bears in itself the substance of an "existential wisdom"; it asks for few symbols; it needs only a homogeneous system: God, prayer, sacrifice and dancing. Fundamentally the negro has a "non-mental" mentality, whence the "mental" importance for him of what is corporeal, his physical sureness and his sense of rhythm. In all these characteristics the black man may be contrasted both with the white man and with the yellow.<sup>2</sup>

The originality of each of the various races is especially apparent in their eyes: those of the white man, generally

<sup>1</sup> Partisans of the short phrase want to treat our morphological languages like Chinese. Certainly the short phrase has a legitimate place in the languages of the white race, but their habitual mode of expression is by complex phrases: in Arabic a whole book is theoretically a single phrase. For the white man a phrase is a bundle of thoughts grouped around a central idea; for the yellow man, who is less exteriorised, it is a "suggestion", a "gong-stroke". Clearly those white peoples who speak Mongolian tongues—Finns, Magyars and Turks—use them differently than did their still Mongolian forbears.

<sup>2</sup> We refer to the negro race as such, which is independent of the degeneration of particular tribes. Speaking in these general terms we must not forget that the present state of black Africa gives hardly any idea of those flourishing civilisations which impressed European and Arab travellers just after the close of the Middle Ages and which later were destroyed.

deep-set, are mobile, piercing and transparent; his soul "goes out" in his look and at the same time appears, in a passive way, through it. The eyes of yellow men are quite different: physically at skin level they are generally indifferent and impenetrable; their look is dry and light like a brush-stroke on silk. As for the black man, his eyes are slightly prominent and heavy, warm and moist; their look reflects the beauty of the tropics and combines sensuality—and sometimes ferocity—with innocence; it is the deep and latent look of the earth. The negro's eyes express what his face is, that is, a sort of heavy contemplativity, while in the case of the white man, who is more "mental", the face seems to express the living fire of his eyes; in the case of the yellow man the eyes pierce, like flashes of impersonal lucidity, through what is static or "existential" in the face. One of the chief charms of the Mongolian type is the complementary relationship between the existential passivity of the face—a certain "femininity" it might be said—and the implacable lucidity of the eyes, a cold and unexpected fire lighting up a mask.

In order to understand the meaning of races one must first of all realize that they are derived from fundamental aspects of humanity and not from something fortuitous in nature. If racialism is something to be rejected, so is an anti-racialism which errs in the opposite direction by attributing racial difference to merely accidental causes and seeks to whittle away these differences by talking about inter-racial blood-groups, or in other words by mixing up things situated on different levels. Moreover, that the isolation of a race should have contributed to its elaboration certainly does not mean that that race can be explained in terms of its isolation alone, nor that the isolation was fortuitous and thus something which might not have happened. Again, the fact that there is nothing absolute in nature and that races are not separated in completely water-tight compartments in no way means that pure

racess are not to be found as well as mixed ethnic groupings. This opinion has no meaning for the simple reason that all men have the same origin and that humanity as a whole—often wrongly referred to as the human race—constitutes one single species. Racial mixtures may be good or detrimental according to the case: mixing may “aerate” an ethnic stock that has become too “compact”, just as it may bastardise a homogeneous group endowed with precise and precious qualities. What is never understood by those who have a passion for racial purity is that there is a greater qualitative difference between the psychic heredity of different natural castes—even if the race be the same—than between that of members of the same caste of differing race; fundamental and personal tendencies have more importance than racial modes, at any rate so far as the major races or healthy branches of these are concerned, though not degenerate groups.<sup>1</sup>

Certain racial traits, which the white man tends to take for signs of inferiority, mark either a less “mental” disposition than that of the average European, though not a less “spiritual” one, or else a greater racial vitality. Here we

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<sup>1</sup> A certain “segregation” of white and black people would be neither ill-judged nor unjust if it were not unilateral, if, that is to say, it were conceived in the interest of both races and without prejudice of superiority; for it is clear that to abolish “segregation” altogether means increasing the probability of racial mixtures and vowing one’s own race, whether it be white or black, to a kind of disappearance. But, since a morally satisfactory segregation could not be realised, the United States should have recognised an area in the South-East as belonging to the black people, for it is absurd to import a race by force and afterwards reproach it for existing. In North Africa, where mixtures between black and white are more or less in the nature of things, as they have been for thousands of years, the problem is different: here the white people are as it were absorbed by the climate as well as by the African quality of the surroundings so that mixtures have given birth to perfectly harmonious human groups; moreover in this case the white element is a Mediterranean one and not Teutonic as in North America. Africans make a clear distinction between Mediterranean and Nordic white men, feeling themselves less far removed from the former than from the latter; it is also very probable that mixtures between human types as divergent as the Nordic and the Negro are not very happy ones.

must draw attention to the mistake of regarding a prognathous face as belonging to an obviously inferior type, as also a low forehead or thick lips. If the white man looks on the yellow types as inferior to his own because they appear to him to share certain characteristics of the facial expression of the negro, the yellow man could, with equal logic, see in the white and black types two divergent forms of degeneration between which his own type holds a right balance—and so on. As for the forehead, its height and the cranial volume mark, if they mark anything (depending on a variety of factors), by no means always an intellectual quality, but more often a capacity which is solely creative or even merely inventive, a capacity which may, by luciferian deviation, become a very hypertrophy of the mind—a specific propensity to “thinking”, but not at all to “knowledge”. No doubt the forehead should not be too low, but there is an adequate size suitable even to the most spiritual of men; anything beyond this has nowise any connection with pure intelligence.

If the head is prognathous, this shows vital force and existential fullness, and thus a consciousness centred on “being”, whereas if it is orthognathous it corresponds to a consciousness relatively detached from that pole, more or less “rootless” or “isolated” in respect of “being” and for that very reason “creative”.<sup>1</sup> An orthognathous face is generally more “open” or more “personal” than one that is prognathous; it exteriorises its contents rather than its whole being, and this is as much

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the faces of Bushmen and Melanesians are more or less orthognathous, while Malays and Indo-Chinese are often markedly prognathous, and this shows the absurdity of the current view that a prognathous type goes with barbarism. If the fact that the peoples just mentioned are orthognathous does not give rise in their case to the same psychological consequences as it does in white peoples this is because it is neutralised by other racial factors, though without losing its significance: every form has meaning, but the meaning is not always actualised in the same way. It is not possible to interpret in a few lines the numerous combinations to which human types are liable, and moreover such is not our intention.



as to say that it more readily shows what it feels and thinks; the nose is prominent as if to compensate for the retreating of mouth and eyes, all of which means a psychic tendency to "extroversion". This nasal characteristic, which often becomes aquiline—the aquiline nose is met with in all races and always suggests analogous characteristics—indicates a cosmic connection with birds, and so with flight, with the skies and winds; there is an aspect of soaring and mobility, but also one of instability and fragility. The spirit of the white man, especially in the West where these features are generally more marked than in the East, has something of the quality of an unquiet and "devouring" fire; in its working it alternately "goes out" and "turns in on itself"; it "opens up" like fire, whereas the spirit of the yellow man is "closed in" like water. The black man, for his part, seems an incarnation of the massiveness, at times volcanic, of the earth, whence comes the serene heaviness, or heavy serenity, of his beauty; his face can have the majesty of a mountain. In so far as this rugged but soft massiveness translates an aspect of Existence and can, for this reason, become the support for a contemplative attitude (as we have found it to be among Moslem negroes), it certainly is not a mark of inferiority. It may be added that the lugubrious side of negro art and of animism in general as well as the sometimes rumbling, breathless and spasmodic tonality of African music are both connected with the element "earth", either in its cavernous, subterranean aspect or in its aspect of fertility and thus of sexuality.

The white race, the thinking of which is more exteriorised, shows, when taken as a whole, a greater "disequilibrium" than the yellow or black races; within the yellow race there is perhaps no greater difference than that between Chinese and Japanese, but this difference is less than that between Europeans and Orientals regarded generally; to go from France to Morocco is almost like travelling to another planet.

The fact that a collectivity in general so little contemplative as the Europeans and another which is the most contemplative of all, the Hindus, can both belong to the same white race shows the essentially "differentiated" character of that race: a Chinese or a Tibetan would feel infinitely less "strange" in Japan—traditional Japan is meant—than a Hindu or an Arab in England—even in the England of the Middle Ages; but from another angle there is a profound mental difference between Hindus and Arabs. The radical diversity of religions among white peoples reflects their mental diversity, that character of theirs at once uneven and creative which, within the framework of European humanity, so easily turns into disequilibrium and hypertrophy: the Mediterranean and Nordic races and the pagan and Christian mentalities have never ceased throughout history to come into collision, for they have never been able to give birth to a sufficiently homogeneous humanity.

Here it is important to note that the religions created by the yellow race<sup>1</sup>, the tradition of Fo-Hi and the I-King, the Confucianism and Taoism connected with this, and finally Shintoism, did not give rise to fundamentally and irreducibly different civilisations as did the great religions of the white race, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism, not to mention the Graeco-Roman West, Ancient Egypt and the other white civilisations of antiquity. Confucianism and Taoism are the two complementary branches issued from a single "pre-historic" tradition and share the same sacred language and the same ideograms; as for Shintoism, it does not concern all spiritual possibilities and so is not a total "religion" but requires a loftier complement which Buddhism has provided, so that we find in Japan a traditional symbiosis such as cannot

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<sup>1</sup> This only in a manner of speaking, for it goes without saying that a religion is revealed by Heaven and not created by a race; but a revelation always conforms to a racial genius, though this by no means signifies that it is restricted to the specific limits of the race in question.

be paralleled among white people; something similar could be said of Buddhism and Shamanism in Tibet and other countries. Be that as it may, what we want to underline here is that the difference between yellow-race civilisations is far less than that between West and East in the world of the white race<sup>1</sup>; to greater equilibrium, greater stability, there must correspond lesser differentiation.

The yellow and black races taken together are distinct from the white in respect of their vitality and their lesser mental exteriorisation, the yellow race in a manner that is dry and light and the black in one that is heavy and "humid"; compared to these two races the white race is "hypersensitive". The yellow race, however, though it is "static" like the black race has not the same "inertia", for it is both creative and industrious. What distinguishes the yellow race from both the white and the black is its intuitive delicacy, its artistic faculty of expressing imponderables, its passionlessness without inertia and its effortless equilibrium; it is more "dry", more impenetrable and less highly strung than the white race and "lighter", more agile and more creative than the black. Perhaps it might also be said that the white man is essentially a "poet"; his soul is at the same time animated and as it were "furrowed". The yellow man is first of all a "painter", an intuitive who visualises things; his psychic life, as we have said, is more "smooth" and static and less "projected forwards" in the sense that things are viewed in the soul instead of the soul being projected into things. As for the black man, he is neither a "cerebral"

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<sup>1</sup> The only fundamental division in the Far-East is that marking the separation of Northern Buddhism in Tibet, Mongolia, China, Manchuria, Annam, Korea and Japan, from Southern Buddhism in Burma, Siam, Cambodia and Laos; Northern Buddhism has been absorbed by the genius of the yellow race whereas in the South it is the racial genius that has been absorbed by Buddhism. Mahāyāna Buddhism in India become yellow, while the Theravādins of Indo-China, as yellow people become Indians, as it were.

type nor a visualiser but "vital", and so a born dancer; he is "profoundly vital" as the yellow man is "delicately visual", both races being "existential" rather than "mental" as compared to the white race. All these expressions can be no more than approximations, for everything is relative, especially in an order of things as complex as race. A race may be compared to a whole style of art with many forms rather than to one exclusive form.

The yellow type has this in common with the black that both are marked by a certain existential indifference—not by an intellectual preoccupation, a "getting out of oneself", a "seeking", or a "penetration"—though in the yellow type this indifference is intuitive and transparent, not vegetative and passionate as in the case of the black type. We are almost tempted to say that the yellow man thinks in "pictures" even abstract ones, rather than by "speculations", while the black man thinks through "forces". The black man's wisdom is dynamic, it is a "metaphysic of forces". Note the very great importance among black peoples of tom-toms, the function of which is central and quasi-sacred: they are the vehicle for rhythms which when communicated to human bodies, bring the whole being into contact with cosmic essences. However paradoxical it may seem, it is the intelligence rather than the body of the negro which is in need of rhythms and dances, and that precisely because his spirit has a "plastic" or "existential" and not an "abstract" way of approach<sup>1</sup>;

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<sup>1</sup> To allow the black man to dance while subjecting him to a civilisation in which dancing has no serious function is wholly inefficacious, for the black man has no use for "permitted dances" or "tolerated rites" or for what is patronised as mere "folk-lore". He needs rhythms of bodies and of drums which he can take seriously, and this both Islam and Abyssinian Christianity offer him. We would readily believe that a particular black man, even in Africa, might not suffer consciously from not being able to dance to the sound of tom-toms; but this is not the question, for we speak of a collective integration and not of individual adaptation. In the case of the American negro this need for bodily and musical rhythms has been maintained but can now be expressed only in trivial mode: that

the body, for the very reason that it is the limit of crystallisation in the demiurgic process, represents "being" as opposed to "thinking", or "our whole being" as opposed to our relatively particular preoccupations or our external consciousness. The roll of tom-toms marks, like heaven's thunder, the voice of Divinity: by its very nature and by its sacred origin it is a "remembrance of God", an "invocation" of the Power which is both creator and destroyer and thus also liberator, an invocation in which human art canalises the divine manifestation and in which, too, man participates, through dancing, with all his being in order to regain the heavenly contact through the "analogical vibrations" between matter and the Spirit. The drum is the altar, its roll marks the "descent" of God and the dance the "ascent" of man<sup>1</sup>.

To return now to the white race, we could, at the risk of repetition, characterise it by the terms "exteriorisation" and "contrast"; what is exteriorised tends towards diversity and richness, but also towards a certain "creative rootlessness" which explains why the white race is alone in having given birth to a number of exceedingly different civilisations, as

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is the posthumous vengeance of a racial genius that has been trampled underfoot. In the same order of ideas such a movement as the Mau-Mau is, in the final analysis, explained, not by "ingratitude" as some have stupidly asserted, but by the simple fact that negroes are negroes and not white men, to use a somewhat elliptical expression; and it is clear that something like this can be said of other similar cases. Let us add that there are no human beings devoid of all value; this is as much as to say that if men are allowed the right to exist they must also be allowed—and that effectively—the right to certain elements of their own culture.

<sup>1</sup> We meet with the same symbolism in dervish dances and, in principle, in every ritual dance. Love dances, harvest dances, or war dances are designed to abolish the barriers between different levels of existence and to establish a direct contact with the "genius" or "divine Name" in question. Human infidelities do not in any way change the principle or take away the value of the means: whatever may be the importance given to utilitarian considerations or to magical procedures in the case of some negro animism or some Siberian or Redskin shamanism, the symbols remain what they are and the bridges towards heaven are doubtless never quite broken down.

has already been pointed out; further, the contrasts, which among white people as a whole are produced "in space" and in simultaneity, have been produced, in the case of Westerners, "in time" during the course of European history. Let us add that, if the white man is a restless and devouring "fire", he can also be—as in the case of the Hindu—a calm and contemplative flame; as for the yellow man, if he is "water", he can reflect the moon but can also be unleashed in violent storms; if the black man is "earth", he has, besides the innocent massiveness of that element, the explosive force of volcanoes.<sup>1</sup>

Each of the three great races, and each of their great intermediate branches, produces perfect beauty, beauty incomparable and in a sense irreplaceable; it is necessarily thus because each of these types is an aspect of the human norm<sup>2</sup>. Compared to white beauty, yellow and black beauty seem much more sculptural; they are much nearer to substance and to femininity than the white type, a femininity which the black race expresses in tellurian mode and the yellow in celestial mode. At its peak yellow beauty realises an almost immaterial nobility, often sweetened by a flower-like simplicity; white beauty is more personal and no doubt less mysterious because more explicit, though for that very reason most expressive and also marked at times by a kind of melancholy

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<sup>1</sup> These correspondences are founded on the visible elements, three in number. We do not know the source of the following classification: white race, water, lymphatic, north, winter; yellow race, air, nervous, east, spring; black race, fire, sanguine, south, summer; red race, earth, bilious, west, autumn. While this picture includes some plausible elements it calls for serious reservations. The fact that the red race includes a type not to be found anywhere else so precisely marked or so widely spread does not authorise us to look on it as a fundamental race, for it also includes types that can be found in the yellow and white races.

<sup>2</sup> According to a too common opinion the norm is identical with the average, which amounts to saying that principle is reduced to fact or quality to quantity; mediocrity and ugliness become "reality". Now in ugliness the genius of the race is imprecise, for beauty alone is typical, it alone represents what is essential and intelligible.

grandeur. It should perhaps be added that the negroid type, at its finest, is not reducible merely to "earth"; it amounts rather to earth's precious concretions and thus escapes its primal heaviness: it then realises a nobility like basalt, obsidian or jasper, a kind of mineral beauty which transcends the passional and evokes the immutable.

At the boundaries of the great races there is also a tropical type, more or less negroid, passing like a weft through the white and yellow types in equatorial regions; this seems to indicate the important, though not exclusive, part played by climate in the elaboration of the black type. There is on the other hand no Nordic type found in the other races, so that it may be concluded that differentiation in the white and yellow races is due only to fundamental divergences of an inner order. However, broadly speaking, there is a Nordic temperament which is opposed to the tropical temperament: outside Europe and its ethnic dependencies the former is represented by the North American Indians—whose type is introvert and but little sensual—and the latter particularly by the Dravidians and Malays.

The subtle and frenetic art of drumming or dancing and an innocent pride, or proud innocence, of the naked body in both sexes—all these are features relating Africans to Dravidians and Balinese, except that among the Balinese the gamelan—an instrument of Mongolian type—replaces the Afro-Indian drum. As with the black people of Africa so also in the soul of the tropical Asiatics in question we find—though in lesser proportion and on a sacerdotal basis, something of the element "earth", something of its fertility, of its "sensuality", its joy and its heavy indifference.

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According to a common but mistaken idea there exists an Italian, a German and a Russian "type" and so forth; in reality there is within each people a series of types, very

divergent and of unequal importance, but all characteristic of that people; then there are types which can also be found among other peoples of the same race and, finally, one or more psychological types that are superimposed on these. For instance, in the series of types which are specifically Japanese one face may come much closer to some Chinese type than to other Japanese faces; in the same way there are to be found among every people of the white race heads describable as "European" or "Arab" or "Hindu"; the psychological significance of these conformations is generally quite secondary and is frequently neutralised by other factors, though a certain significance is always valid as regards their "mental style".

A similar error, much more widespread because tangled up with political feelings and regional pride, is that which confuses a people with the state in which the majority of them are living, and believes that groups accidentally found outside the frontiers of that state form other peoples. Thus only the inhabitants of France—including groups foreign to the French people—are called "French" and only inhabitants of Germany "Germans"; people no longer speak, as they once rightly spoke, of "the Germanies". The idea that the Walloons are different from the "French" is a case in point, as though Normans were not different from Gascons or as though some Germans (or rather "people in Germany") in the South were not far more different from Prussians than from Alsatians or German Swiss, the Alemmanic tribe having been divided by several political frontiers as has also happened with the Bavaro-Austrian tribe. Regionalists also often cite mental differences due to secondary causes, exaggerating their importance; they forget, not merely that far greater differences occur within each country between different churches, political parties, cultural levels and so forth, but also that political mentalities may be modified from one generation to another. In the same way a pacific nature is often attributed to a



particular people, or to an autonomous fraction of a people, just because they have no motive for making war, or are in no position to do so, or else because they only fight with "coloured people" and so forth; but there is no end to the confusions of this kind,

So far as real ethnic mentalities within Europe are concerned it is no exaggeration to say that Latins are rational and Teutons imaginative: speaking generally an argument must be addressed either mainly to reason or to imagination according to whether it is intended for French or for German audiences. These traits may be good qualities—it would indeed be ungracious to reproach some Rhineland mystic for his spiritualised imagination—just as they can be defects, and in the latter case we say that a rationalism both "passionate" and devoid of imagination, or in other words both arbitrary and sterile, has no greater worth than an intemperate imagination that is also passionate; we are almost tempted to say that for the average Frenchman grandeur is folly, while for a German folly is grandeur, rather as La Fontaine distinguished Frenchmen from Spaniards by saying of pride that "ours is much more stupid and theirs much more mad". And as for language, one knows that Latin words "define" whereas those of Germanic tongues "re-create" so that in the latter there is frequent onomatopoeia; Latin discerns, separates and isolates whereas Germanic languages are "existential" and symbolical, remaking things and suggesting qualities. A further example of these mental differences is furnished by German or Gothic script, which well expresses what the Teutonic, and especially the German genius has of imaginative, "vegetative", "warm" and "intimate" qualities, (as shown in such words as *traut*, *heimatlich* and *geborgen*) whereas the Latin lettering by its mineral coldness and geometrical simplicity exteriorises the clarity and somewhat unimaginative precision of the Romans. The importance of

Gothic characters in the Middle Ages goes hand in hand with that of Teutonic influence, against which the Renaissance battled and which the Reformation reaffirmed in its own fashion. The mediaeval cities of Northern Europe with their narrow houses, often outlandish in shape with the joinery showing, similarly expresses what is at the same time intimate and fantastic in the Teutonic soul.

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In art the white man, or at any rate the Occidental, tends to detach man from nature, even to oppose him to it; the yellow man remains in nature, which he spiritualises and never destroys, so that his buildings always retain something of the spirit of the forest, and this is true even of Hinduised Indo-Chinese with whom a Hindu perspective has become integrated into a Mongolian way of seeing and feeling. In general it can be said that the material civilisation of the yellow race remains based largely on the "vegetable" and "on nature", being associated with wood, bamboo and pottery rather than with stone, which the yellow man seems in general to distrust as being too "dead" and "ponderous" a material.<sup>1</sup> From another angle, nothing is further from the genius of the yellow race than the muscular and dramatic nudes of the Westerners<sup>2</sup>; the yellow man sees primordial and celestial sublimity,

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<sup>1</sup> The great stone temples of Angkor Wat and Borobudur are Indian monuments executed by yellow men Indianised.

<sup>2</sup> There is a narrow classicism which, because it has no objectively valid criterion and is as lacking in imagination as in intelligence and taste, sees in Chinese civilisation only meanness and routine: the Chinese are deemed inferior because they never produced a Michael-Angelo or a Corneille or because they did not create the Ninth Symphony and so forth; now, if there is nothing Promethean in the greatness of the Chinese civilisation, that is because it takes its stand on points where the classical prejudice cannot understand it; on the purely artistic level there are ancient bronzes which show more greatness and profundity than the whole of European nineteenth century painting. The first thing to be understood is that there is no true greatness apart from truth, and that truth certainly has no need of grandiloquent expressions. In these days we see a new

not in the human body, but in virgin nature: the deities of the yellow race are like flowers, their faces like the full moon or the lotus; even the celestial nymphs of Buddhism combine their nudity, which still remains wholly Hindu in its marked sexuality and rhythm, with the flower-like grace lent them by the genius of yellow man. In the yellow man's art the serenity of Buddhas and the translucency of landscapes denote qualities of expression not to be found in the same degree anywhere else, qualities which are the very opposite of the tortured genius of the white peoples of Europe. Far-Eastern painting has an aerial grace, the inimitable charm of a vision that is furtive and precious; but, by compensation, the presence of dragons, genii and demons adds to the art of the Far East a dynamic and flamboyant element.

Despite direct or contingent analogies with the Western knight, the Japanese hero<sup>1</sup> keeps the laconic quality of the Mongol soul, but this is compensated by a lyrical quality that is certainly stirring though it remains visual rather than auditive in character and always draws its inspiration from nature. The Samurai is terse and subtle and does not forget, even in his sublimest moments, either practical sense or courtesy; he has impetuosity, a cold discipline and the delicacy both of an artist and of a Zen contemplative; the classical theatre represents him as a sort of celestial insect whose astonishing capers and hieratic inflexibilities are far indeed from the hero of Greek or Shakespearean drama. In the yellow man's soul, which is little given to declamation, the

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reaction against classicism in the wider sense, but this reaction, far from being wholesome, comes on the contrary from below, according to the usual rhythm of a certain kind of "evolution".

<sup>1</sup> It is sometimes said that the Japanese have "European souls" which is just as false as asserting that the Russians have "Asiatic souls"; had the spirit of Japan been like that of the West, Mahāyāna Buddhism could never have been planted there, still less could it have been preserved intact; the same is true of Buddhist art, which found in Japan one of its most highly spiritual expressions.

smallest things unveil their secret greatness: a flower, a cup of tea, a precise and transparent brush-stroke; the greatness pre-exists in things, in their primary truth. This is also expressed in the music of the Far East: shrill sounds which form beads like the spume of a solitary cascade in a kind of morning melancholy; gong-strokes like the shuddering of a mountain of brass; rhythmic melodies surging up from the intimacies of nature, but also from a sacred source, from the grave and golden dancing of the Gods.

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Despite the reservations which had to be made at the outset, we should perhaps return at this point to the analogy established above between the three fundamental or "absolute" races and the three visible elements<sup>1</sup> by relating this to the Hindu theory of the three cosmic tendencies, the *gunas*. The Hindus attribute fire, which rises and gives light, to the ascending tendency, *sattva*; water, which is transparent and spreads horizontally, to the expansive tendency, *rajas*; and earth, which is heavy and opaque, to the descending or solidifying tendency, *tamas*. The precarious nature of the ascending tendency explains both the Graeco-Roman and the modern deviations: that which is intellectual penetration and contemplativity among Hindus has become mental hypertrophy and ingenuity among Westerners; in both cases the accent is on "thought" in the widest sense, but the results are diametrically opposed. The white race is "speculative" both in the true and in the improper sense: it has powerfully affected

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<sup>1</sup> The two invisible elements, air and ether, are comprised in the visible elements, the former in a "horizontal" and "secondary" sense, the latter in a "vertical" or "primordial" sense; fire and water are absorbed into air which is as it were their basis on which they live, whereas ether penetrates all the other elements, being their *matéria prima* or quintessence (*quinta essentia*). It must be clearly understood that in speaking of "elements" we are not thinking of chemical analysis but of the natural and immediate symbolism of appearances which is perfectly valid and even "exact" from the point of view here adopted.

the spirit of other races, not only through Brāhminism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, but also through the modern deviation, without having been reciprocally influenced, except perhaps slightly. The yellow race is contemplative without laying stress on the dialectical element, without, that is, feeling any need to clothe its wisdom in complex and highly mobile mentations; this race gave birth to Taoism, Confucianism and Shintoism; it created a writing unique in kind and an art that is original, profound and powerful, but it has not determined any foreign civilisation; it has received a profound impression from Buddhism, a wisdom not of yellow origin—it is not, of course, the wisdom that is racial but the human vehicle of the Revelation—while imprinting on that tradition the mark of its own powerful and subtle genius.<sup>1</sup> The conquests of the yellow peoples swept along like a tidal wave throwing down everything in their path but not transforming their victims as did the white man's conquests<sup>2</sup>; the yellow races, whatever their impetuosity, "conserve" like water and do not "transmute" like fire; as conquerors they allow themselves to be absorbed by the vanquished of foreign civilisation. As for

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<sup>1</sup> Here the pre-Columbian civilisations of America must equally be mentioned, though in this case there was, alongside the Mongol element, an Atlantean element perhaps anterior to the great differentiation of races, or connected to the white peoples by an affinity with the ancient Egyptians and the primitive Berbers. America then showed, both racially and culturally, a sort of mixture of Mongolian, Siberia and ancient Egypt; hence the Shamanism, the conical tents, the leather robes adorned with tassels, the magic drums, the long hair, the feathers and the fringes, and, in the South, the pyramids, the colossal temples with their static form, the hieroglyphs and the mummies.—Between the three great races of humanity there are doubtless not only types due to admixtures but also, it would seem, types which remained more or less undifferentiated; it can equally be supposed that, while primordial humanity did not as yet know different races, it sporadically included highly differentiated types which as it were prefigured the races of today.

<sup>2</sup> Caesar Romanised Gaul, the Moslems Islamised parts of Africa, Europe and Asia and the Europeans have Europeanised America, but the Mongols never "Mongolised" any country. Their spiritual genius is too implicit to be able to work such a change in other races.

the black race, they are, as has been already said, "existential" and this explains their passivity and lack of aptitude for radiating outwards, even within the fold of Islam; but this characteristic becomes qualitative and spiritual through the intervention of the contemplative element deep-rooted in every man which gives its value to every natural determination.

It could also be said that the white and yellow races, in so far as they respectively correspond to the elements "fire" and "water", meet in the element "air". Air has the two qualities of lightness (*sattva*) and mobility (*rajas*), whereas fire is characterised by luminosity (*sattva*) and heat (*rajas*) and water by fluidity (*rajas*) and weight or passivity (*tamas*); but there is also destructiveness (*tamas*) in fire and transparency (*sattva*) in water, so that inasmuch as "transparency" predominates in the yellow race, in its contemplativity and in the art in which this quality is materialised, it comes "nearer to Heaven" than the white race inasmuch as the latter takes on the aspect of destructiveness (*tamas*). The element "earth" has the two aspects of heaviness or immobility (*tamas*) and fertility (*rajas*) but also adds to these, through minerals, a luminous possibility which might be termed "crystallinity" (*sattva*); the spirituality of black men often has a static purity and turns to account all that the negro mentality contains of the stable, the simple and the concrete. That which is "inertia" (earth) in the black man becomes "equilibrium" (water) in the yellow man, and one of the most striking traits of that race is indeed its faculty of holding the balance between extremes. As for the instability (fire) of the white man, it is significant that the Hindus have neutralised this by the caste system in order to obviate from the outset the danger of deviation inherent in the fiery cosmic quality (*sattva*)<sup>1</sup>; among the

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<sup>1</sup> We refer here to a theory according to which fire, inasmuch as it tends to rise and to illuminate, corresponds to *sattva*, whereas water, inasmuch as it spreads horizontally and fertilises can be assimilated to *rajas*,

Semites, and among Europeans influenced by the Semitic spirit, this instability is compensated by religious dogmatism.<sup>1</sup> Ether has the intrinsic quality of principial immutability or ipseity (*sattva*) and the extrinsic aspects of differentiation (*rajas*) and solidification (*tamas*); in this play of correspondencies it would then represent primordial man or—by derivation—man as such. This “alchemy” will not seem strange to our regular readers and will above all show them—if there is need for such demonstration—that in each racial determination there is a positive aspect which, in case of need, is able to neutralise a baneful aspect.

In any case, if the white race can claim any real pre-eminence, it can do so only through the Hindu group which in a way perpetuates the primordial state of the Indo-Europeans and, in a wider sense, that of white men as a whole. The Hindus surpass every other human group by their extraordinary contemplativity and the metaphysical genius resulting from this; but the yellow race is in its turn far more contemplative than the Western branch of the white race, and this makes it possible, looking at things as a whole, to speak of spiritual superiority in the traditional East, whether white or yellow, also including in this superiority the Messianic and Prophetic outlook of the Semites, which runs parallel with the Āryan *avatāric* outlook. All these facts are now called in question because of the modern spirit, which has the power so to shake or upset all values that a natural propensity to

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earth then corresponding to *tamas* owing to its inertia and compressive power; but it goes without saying that in another respect fire is *rajas* through its consuming and passionate heat, in which case light alone corresponds to *sattva*; this is the trend not of the visible elements—fire, earth—but of the sensory functions of the sun-fire; luminosity, heat and negatively, darkness. Pure luminosity is cold through its transcendence; darkness is cold only through privation.

<sup>1</sup> As for those groups of yellow and black people who are adherents of Semitic religions, dogma appears in their case, not in its stabilising function, but in its simplifying function, the danger for them being, not one of ideological divagation, but of ignorance and materialism.

spirituality may lose all its efficacy, and a new spirituality may in the end come to be actualised in a quarter where it could least have been expected. This leads us once again to underline the conditional nature of all hereditary superiority: if one takes account of the part played by religious and ideological influences as well as of the interplay of compensations in both space and time, if one observes, for instance, that some group held to be barbarian may be incontestably superior to some other group held to be civilised (not to speak of the possibility of a personal superiority of individuals of any group whatsoever) then one must recognise that the question of racial superiority is in practice pointless.

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It will have been gathered from what has been said above that for us the question is not: "What is our racial heritage?" but much rather: "What are we making of that heritage?" To talk about a racial value is, for the individual, quite meaningless, for the existence of Christ or of the Vedāntic doctrine adds nothing to the value of a white man with a base nature any more than the barbarism of certain African tribes takes anything away from a Negro of saintly soul; and as for the effective value, not of a race, but of an ethnic atavism, this is a question of "spiritual alchemy", not of scientific or racialist dogmatism.

In one respect the metaphysical reason for races is that differences cannot be merely qualitative as in the case of castes; differences can and must also arise "horizontally", from the point of view simply of modes and not of essences. There cannot be only differences between light and darkness, there must also be differences of colour.

If each caste is in some way to be found in the other castes, the same thing can be said of races and for the same reasons and apart from any question of racial admixtures. But besides castes and races there are also the four temperaments,



which Galen relates to the four sensible elements, and the astrological types, which are related to the planets of our system. All these types or possibilities are present in the human substance and form the individual by determining him in many different ways: to know the aspects of man is one way of better knowing oneself.

Races exist and we cannot ignore them, less than ever now that the time when the world was divided as if into closed universes has come to an end and with it the right to purely conventional simplifications; in any case what it is above all important to understand is that racial determination can only be relative, man thus determined never ceasing to be man.

The modern movement towards uniformity, which causes the world to become smaller and smaller, seems able to attenuate racial differences, at any rate at the mental level and without speaking of ethnic mixtures. In this there is nothing surprising if one reflects that this standardising civilisation is at the opposite pole from any higher synthesis, based as it is solely on man's earthly needs; human animality provides in principle a rather facile ground for mutual understanding and favours the breaking down of traditional civilisations under the auspices of a quantitative and spiritually inoperative "culture". But the fact of thus depending on what gives mankind a "low level solidarity" presupposes the detaching of the masses, who are intellectually passive and unconscious, from the elites who legitimately represent them and in consequence also incarnate both the tradition, in so far as it is adapted to a given race, and the genius of that race in the most lofty sense.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> When Guénon wrote of "Orientals" without qualification he meant, either the intellectual and traditional elites who are representative for the masses, or else—and it amounts to the same thing—the masses in so far as they are determined by the elites on the one hand and by tradition on the other, these two things always going together. When we use here some

Let us take the opportunity to insert here, alongside these considerations about races and not unconnected with them, some remarks on the opposition—true or false—between West and East. First of all there is in both cases an inner opposition between the sacred patrimony and whatever either actively or passively moves away from that patrimony; this shows that the distinction between East and West is not absolute, that there is a “Western East” as there was—and perhaps still is within certain limits—an “Eastern West”, as at Mount Athos or in some other relatively isolated situation. In considering the East we must thus start by differentiating, if we are to avoid inextricable contradictions, between Orientals who owe nothing, or almost nothing, to the West and have every right and reason to resist it, and those who on the contrary owe, or imagine they owe, everything to it, but who also often spend their time in enumerating the colonialist crimes of Europe, as though Europeans were the only men to have conquered countries and exploited peoples. The insensate haste with which Westernised Orientals of every political colour press on with the westernising of the East proves beyond all question how thoroughly they themselves are convinced of the superiority of modern Western civilisation, that very civilisation which engendered colonialism as also the cult of

collective term in referring to the traditional masses or to spiritual elites, the respective complement must always be implicitly understood—the people when we write of the elite and *vice versa*. But, once the elites are virtually eliminated, it is no longer possible to speak of “Orientals” in Guénon’s sense. Very clearly such elimination presupposes—and brings in its train—the infidelity of a fraction, even if only of a small fraction, of the elite, for perversion of intelligence and bad example are part of the business: *corruptio optimi pessima*. If we write “elites” in the plural it is not because we believe in the existence of some other elite besides that which is intellectual or spiritual—without a foundation of truth and so of intellectuality no spirituality can exist—but solely in order to show that the elite includes modes and levels which run through a people as arteries run through a body; if the elite is first of all sacerdotal in substance, it is none the less true that sections of the elite are to be found at all levels of society, just as, inversely, there is no sacerdotal body without its Pharisees, but this fact in no way abolishes the normal hierarchy.

machines and Marxism. Now there are few things so absurd as the anti-Westernism of those who are themselves westernised. Choice must be made: either that civilisation is worthy of adoption, in which case Europeans are supermen to whom unbounded gratitude is owing, or else Europeans are malefactors deserving contempt and then they and their civilisation fall together and there is no reason for imitating them. But in practice the West is being completely and whole-heartedly imitated even in the most pointless of its caprices; far from limiting themselves to modern armaments for purposes of legitimate defence or to an equipment of economic tools capable of meeting the situations created by an overpopulation that is itself partly due to the biological crimes of modern science, Eastern nations adopt the very soul of the antitraditional West to the point of seeking in the "science of religions", in psycho-analysis and even in surrealism the keys to the age-old wisdom of the East. In a word, they believe in the superiority of the West but reproach Westerners for having believed in it.

Let us leave this paradoxical aspect of modernism and inquire of the timeless soul of Asia and of Africa. In the eyes of non-Western men who remain faithful to their traditions what makes Western colonialism more odious than other yokes which were physically more cruel is precisely those characteristics which are found only in modern civilisation: firstly a materialism that is not merely confined to the physical realm but also claims the realm of the spirit—materialism *de jure* and not only *de facto*—secondly the mixture of hypocrisy<sup>1</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> It is, for instance, a biased hypocrisy to call a people "barbarous" because they "did such and such things" and to deny them on that account rights considered to be elementary, while attributing the same kind of actions in other favoured cases to the "period" or to "circumstances", according to whether they be past or present. Again, when people cannot avoid applying the term "barbarism" to European adversaries the same hypocrisy often makes them add the epithet "Asiatic" as though the Europeans as such—considered, that is, apart from any affinity with the rest of humanity—somehow were incapable of evil-doing.

perfidy which stems from this materialism and thirdly the fact that everything is made trivial and ugly; but above all it is his political invincibility and cultural inassimilability which confer on the "white man"—in the conventional sense of the term—a character never before seen, something as it were extra-human or "Martian"<sup>1</sup>. Neither Mongols nor Moslems showed this strange antitraditional spirit; their military power was not absolute; Mongols and Manchus were turned into Chinese, other Mongols were absorbed by Islam or, in the West, by Christianity. The conquering thrust of the Moslems finally came up against its natural limits, but what is far more important is that the Islamic mentality was traditional and in its deepest tendencies reconcilable with Hinduism: Moslem spirituality could even give a fresh impetus to Vaiṣṇavite mysticism, just as Buddhism had been able, a few centuries earlier, to revivify certain aspects of Hindu spirituality. The very least one can say is that the modern spirit includes nothing of the kind—granted its professed principles and its

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<sup>1</sup> The people of a colonising country take a far too summary view of their colonies in the sense that they think only of "benefits conferred"—or what seem so in their eyes—and forget, not only the scale of values of the foreign civilisation, but also the special mentality of the colonial settlers, which is necessarily deformed by their own abnormal and psychologically "unhealthy" situation. The question is endlessly discussed whether the colonial peoples are "good" or "bad", "grateful" or "ungrateful", and it is forgotten that, being men, they cannot fail to have certain reactions in certain circumstances. Colonial settlers inevitably have an absurd superiority complex, as Lyautey noted with regret, and the "natives" cannot fail to suffer because of it; there are some things in the human soul which cannot be replaced by means of roads and hospitals and it is astonishing that Europeans, who are such "idealists", should be so slow to perceive this. If Europeans believe that they offer to those they "protect" liberties they never knew, they do not take into account that these liberties exclude other modes of liberty of which they themselves hardly conceive any longer; they give good things, but at the same time impose their own conceptions of what is good, and this comes back to the ancient saying that might is always right. This mentality first dams up and then releases in the colonial people all that is basest in collective man; everything possible has been done to compromise the tradition whose ruin was always the hidden hope, and then people are astonished at the evil springing from its disintegration.

tendencies and in spite of current illusions—and that the Western menace to the most sacred things of the East on the contrary knows no limits, as is precisely proved by the antitraditional spirit of “Young Orientals” or by what comes to the same thing, the present urge to suicide of the East.

For “youth” the final humiliation is to be weak and thus open to “colonisation”; weakness is then often seen as synonymous with tradition, as if no question of truth need arise either in the evaluation of Western strength or in the interpretation of traditional values. What gives strength, they think, is true, even if it leads down to hell; ancient corruption is succeeded by an angry and even diabolical virtue; they would “liberate” a people even at the price of what gives meaning to its existence and readily accept the idea that “we must move with the times”, as if there could be an imperative requiring man to abdicate his intelligence, or indeed permitting him to do so. If error is inevitable, so, just as much, is intellectual opposition to error, and this, quite apart from any question of what may be opportune or presently effective; truth is good, not because it is opportune or obviously efficacious, but because it is true, not forgetting that truth coincides with reality and that, therefore, *vincit omnia Veritas*.

All these considerations call to mind the disappointment felt by some when they see how easily agelong traditions crumble despite the contemplative mentality of the peoples concerned, a mentality which they had believed would offer sure guarantees. But two things are forgotten: in the first place, there are not only contemplative Orientals and “activist” Westerners, there are also, whatever the traditional setting, both men who are spiritual and men who are worldly; in the second place, only a minority in any civilisation consciously and actively participates in the spirit of the tradition, the majority remaining more or less “fallow”, open, that is, to receive influences of no matter what kind. It is well known how

easily many Hindus, Malays and Chinese accepted a spiritual form so foreign to them as Islam, and this is proof of a certain detachment from their native traditions; when there is joined to this detachment, or this passivity, as the case may be, a materialistic and worldly spirit (God knows many Orientals can be "in fact" materialists) there is no need to be astonished when traditions are abandoned and materialistic ideologies adopted. Worldliness in the widest sense, love of pleasures or greed of gain, or in short the over-esteeming of the things of this world, has always been a door open to error; an intellectual capacity is far from being absolute as a criterion and guarantee. Here it should be added that the spiritual minority which consciously and "actively" participates in the tradition is to be found in every layer of society, and this amounts to saying inversely that "passive", "unconscious" and "worldly" people are also to be found everywhere.

In an analogous field we should wish to say this: whatever may be the defects of modern man it cannot be said that he enjoys no kind of superiority over "ancient" man, even if it be only in a conditional and virtual sense: suppose a Western man of today came to recognise all the errors that surround him and suppose he could return to the Middle Ages or live in no matter what wholly traditional world and adopt its ways of thinking and acting, even then, despite everything, he would never become quite a mediaeval man; he would retain the imprint of experiences unknown to the generality of non-modern men. Here we have in mind especially a critical sense which is developed only thanks to obstacles and of which a traditional world is ignorant because certain obstacles never appear there; there are functions of intelligence which are hardly ever deployed except in struggle and disappointment. In traditional worlds a certain tendency to exaggeration and to its accompanying illogicalities, as well as to facile prejudices, is inevitable and is explained precisely by the too "compact"

character of ideas and tastes; in other words there are realms of his being in which ancient man never suffered just as there are things he never saw called in question. Man is made in such a way that he is never fully actualised within the limits of his possibilities except with the help of constraints, otherwise he would be perfect; where there is no brake there is exaggeration and unconsciousness. If what has just been said cannot be applied to the chosen vessels of the ancient wisdoms, it does apply to the common run of men and it is they who necessarily give their imprint to the whole civilisation.

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In conclusion let us return to the question of race: if ethnic differences only too often provide illusory motives for hatred, more normally they include reasons for love: by this we mean that foreign races have something complementary in relation to ourselves without there being in principle any "lack" in us or in them either. Assuredly it would be senseless to love a whole race or to love some individual just because he belongs to a foreign race; but it is clear that one could not understand some particular racial beauty without understanding and consequently "loving" the race which is its substance—any more than one could love a woman without loving femininity—and this is all the more true on the level of the soul: the qualities which make a particular human being lovable at the same time make the genius of his race lovable. In the final analysis one can only love the Self, for there is nothing else in the Universe to love; now a man of another race, supposing he corresponds to us by analogy and complementarism, is like a forgotten aspect of ourselves and thus also like a rediscovered mirror of God.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE SACRED PIPE OF THE RED INDIANS

Better for each one is his own law of action, even if it be imperfect, than the law of another, even well applied. It is better to perish in one's own law; it is perilous to follow the law of another.

—*Bhagavad Gītā*, ch. III, v. 35.

It will doubtless come as something of a surprise to Indian readers to find here a chapter on the tradition of the North American Redskins figuring side by side with more familiar subjects: this fact calls for a few words of explanation by way of showing that this unexpected reference to a rarely appreciated form of spirituality has been introduced advisedly and for reasons that are not foreign to the general purpose of this book.

There is always something to be gained from the consideration, across differences of form, race and historical background, of the same great metaphysical truths to which one's own tradition is one's most directly accessible witness: every concordant testimony will serve to reinforce one's own deepest convictions. Such a force of example will lose none of its efficacy when it is offered, as in the present case, by the survivors of a proud and heroic people who, with a tenacity almost unparalleled, have managed to preserve, if precariously, the essentials of a metaphysical doctrine of the most profound character, together with the sacred rites serving as its vehicle among men, in the face of adverse conditions such as, for any people less strong minded, would long since have made them give up in despair. The truth is that the Red



Indians, even in defeat and despoilment, have never suffered from a sense of inferiority in regard to the White civilization that overwhelmed them; in this respect they differ from many who, seemingly, have been far more fortunately placed. Denied the things usually associated with the word *svarāj* the Redskin has yet kept its deeper meaning alive in his own heart; and that is why he also has something to offer to all who still value that spiritual freedom without which all other so-called freedoms are but an empty shell.

However, there are also other and more particular reasons why the wisdom of the Redskins should be of interest to Hindus and these rest upon the truly primordial character of the tradition in question, which in many of its expressions as also in its manner of reading deep truths through the signs of Nature is highly reminiscent of India in Vedic times. Similarly, the cosmological lore of the American Indians exhibits many striking analogies with the corresponding Hindu doctrine, a parallelism that is all the more suggestive inasmuch as there is no known connection between the two forms—unless perhaps one were to hark back to an original northern home of traditional wisdom, long prior to all recorded history. What is however certain is that the American Indians, though accidentally so named by the early European invaders who in sailing Westward had thought to open a new route to Asia and its wealth—cupidity was, with them, a dominant motive—well deserve the title in virtue of a spiritual kinship that makes all true traditions one and all noble peoples *Aryas*.

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The tradition of the Indians of North America<sup>1</sup> has, in the Sacred Pipe, an all-important symbol and “means of grace” which represents not only a doctrinal synthesis, both

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<sup>1</sup> Or rather, to be more precise: the Indians of the plains and forests which stretch from the Rocky Mountains (and even from farther West) to the Atlantic Ocean.

concise and complex, but also an instrument of ritual around which centres their whole spiritual and social life. To describe the symbolism of the Sacred Pipe and of its rite is thus, in a certain sense, to expound the sum of Redskin wisdom. It will not be necessary to treat this subject here in all its fullness; to do so would be difficult inasmuch as the Red Indian tradition varies considerably in its forms of expression (as may be seen for example in the myth of the origin of the Calumet and the symbolism of colours), such variations being due to the scattering of the tribes in the course of the centuries<sup>1</sup>; we will therefore dwell rather upon the fundamental aspects of this wisdom which, as such, remain always the same beneath the variety of the ways in which they are expressed. We will use, however, in preference to others, the doctrinal symbols found among the Sioux, well known to our friend J. Epes Brown who recorded, from the lips of the late Black Elk (Hehaka Sapa), the account of the rites of the Sioux nation (*The Sacred Pipe*, University of Oklahoma Press: Norman).<sup>2</sup>

The Indians of North America are one of the races which have been most studied by ethnographers; yet it cannot be said that everything about them is fully known, for the simple reason that ethnography does not embrace all possible forms of knowledge and therefore cannot possibly be regarded as a general key. There is in fact a sphere which by definition is beyond the reach of ordinary science ("outward" or "profane" science, that is to say), but which is the very basis of every civilisation: this is spirituality,—the knowledge of Divine Reality and of the means of realizing It, in some degree or other, in oneself. Clearly no one can understand any one

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<sup>1</sup> The same thing is true of Hinduism and perhaps of every tradition which has a mythological form; in Hinduism the same symbols may vary considerably from region to region: the same term may signify a fundamental reality in one place and a secondary aspect of the same reality elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> Black Elk died in 1950 in Pine Ridge Reservation (South Dakota).

form of spirituality without knowing spirituality in itself<sup>1</sup>; to be able to know the wisdom of a people we must first of all possess the keys to such wisdom, and these indispensable keys are to be found, not in any subsidiary branch of learning, but in intellectuality at its purest and most universal level. To disallow that which is the very essence of all true wisdom is to bar ourselves in advance from understanding any wisdom at all; in other words, the forms of a known wisdom are the necessary keys to the understanding of any other wisdom as yet unknown.

Some writers feel the need to question whether the idea of God is really present in the Red Indian religion, because they think they see in it a sort of "pantheism" or "immanentism"; but this misunderstanding is simply due to the fact that most of the Indian terms for the Divinity refer to all its possible aspects, and not merely, as is the case with the word "God", (at least in practice) to its personal aspect alone; *Wakan-Tanka* (the "Great Spirit") is God not only as Creator and Lord but also as Impersonal Essence.

Objections are sometimes raised to this name "Great Spirit" as a translation of the Sioux word *Wakan-Tanka*, and of similar terms in other Indian languages; but though *Wakan-Tanka* (and the terms which correspond to it) can also be translated by "Great Mystery" or "Great Mysterious Power" (or even "Great Medicine"), and though "Great Spirit" is no doubt not absolutely adequate, it none the less serves quite well enough and in any case conveys the meaning in question better than any other term; it is true that the word "spirit" is rather indefinite, but it has for that reason the advantage of implying no restriction, and this is exactly what the "poly-synthetic" term *Wakan* requires. The

<sup>1</sup> It is quite evident that a knowledge of skull shapes, idioms and folklore customs in no wise qualifies a person for an intellectual penetration of ideas and symbols. Certain ethnologists believe themselves justified in calling "vague" every conception they themselves fail to understand.

expression "Great Mystery" which has been suggested as a translation of *Wakan-Tanka* (or of the analogous terms, such as *Wakonda* or *Manitu*, in other Indian languages) is no better than "Great Spirit" at expressing the idea in question: besides, what matters is not whether the term corresponds exactly to what we mean by "Spirit", but whether the ideas expressed by the Red Indian term may be translated by "Spirit" or not.

The Sioux make a clear distinction between the Essential Aspects of *Wakan-Tanka*: *Tunkashila* ("Grandfather") is *Wakan-Tanka* in so far as He is beyond all manifestation, and even beyond all quality or determination whatsoever (*nirguṇa Brahman*); *Ate* ("Father") on the other hand is "God in Act": the Creator, the Nourisher, the Destroyer (*saguṇa Brahman*, *Īśvara*). Analogously they make a distinction, as regards the "Earth", between *Unchi* ("Grandmother") and *Ina* ("Mother"): *Unchi* is the Substance of all things (*Mūla-Prākṛti*), whereas *Ina* is Her creative act (considered here as "childbearing"), which conjointly with "inspiration" by *Ate*, produces all beings—*Prākṛti* viewed in her relation to *Puruṣa*.

It is through the animal species and the phenomena of nature that the Indian contemplates the angelic Essences and the divine Qualities; in this connection we will quote from one of Joseph Epes Brown's letters: "It is often difficult for those who look on the tradition of the Red Man from the outside or through the "educated" mind, to understand their preoccupation with the animals, and with all things in the Universe. But for these people, as of course for all traditional peoples, every created object is important simply because they know the metaphysical correspondence between this world and the "Real World". No object is for them what it appears to be, but it is simply the pale shadow of a Reality. It is for this reason that every created object is *wakan*, holy, and has a power according to the loftiness of the spiritual

reality that it reflects; thus many objects possess negative powers as well as those which are positive and good, and every object is treated with respect, for the particular "power" that it possesses can be transferred into man—of course they know that everything in the Universe has its counterpart in the soul of man. The Indian humbles himself before the whole of creation, especially when "lamenting" (that is, when he ritually invokes the "Great Spirit" in solitude), because all visible things were created before him and, being older than he, deserve respect (this priority of created things may also be taken as a symbol of the Priority of the Principle); but although the last of created things, man is also the first, since he alone may know the Great Spirit (*Wakan-Tanka*)".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "The Indian's religion is generally spoken of as Nature and Animal worship. The term seems too broadcast and indiscriminate. Careful inquiry and observation fail to show that the Indian actually worships the objects which are set up or mentioned by him in his ceremonies. The earth, the four winds, the sun, moon and stars, the stones, the water, the various animals, are all exponents of a mysterious life and power. . . ." (Alice C. Fletcher: *The Elk Mystery or Festival*). "A thing is not only what it is visibly, but also what it represents. Natural or artificial objects are not for the primitive, as they can be for us, arbitrary "symbols" of some other and higher reality, but actual manifestations of this reality: the eagle or the lion, for example, is not so much a symbol or image of the Sun as it is the Sun in a likeness (the form being more important than the nature in which it may be manifested); and in the same way every house is the world in a likeness, and every altar is situated at the centre of the earth; it is only because "we" are more interested in what things are than in what they mean, more interested in particular facts than in universal ideas, that this is "inconceivable" to us. Descent from a totem animal is not, then, what it appears to the anthropologist, a literal absurdity, but a descent from the Sun, the Progenitor and *Prajāpati* of all, in that form in which he revealed himself whether in vision or in dream, to the founder of the clan. The same reasoning validates the eucharistic meal; the Father-Progenitor is sacrificed and partaken of by his descendants, in the flesh of the sacred animal: "This is my body, take and eat." So that, as Lévy-Bruhl says of such symbols, "very often it is not their purpose to 'represent' their prototype to the eye, but to facilitate a participation", and that "if it is their essential function to 'represent', in the full sense of the word, invisible beings or objects, and to make their presence effective, it follows that they are not necessarily reproductions or likenesses of these beings or objects." (Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought*).

This will help to explain in what way every "characteristic" thing, that is, everything that manifests an "essence", is *wakan*, "sacred". To believe that God is the sun is certainly an altogether "pagan" error (and one that is quite foreign to Red Indian thought), but it is just as absurd (at least, metaphysically) to believe that the sun is simply and solely an incandescent mass or, in other words, that it "is" not God in any sense whatsoever. We might express the idea like this: *wakan* is whatever conforms integrally to its proper "genius", its *svadharma*; the Principle is *Wakan-Tanka*, namely: what is absolutely "Self"; on the other hand a sage is he who is entirely in conformity with his "genius" or with his "essence", with that which is no other than the "Great Spirit" or the "Great Mystery". *Wakan* is what enables us to "apprehend" directly the divine Reality; a man is *wakan* when his soul manifests the Divine with the spontaneous and flashing evidence of the wonders of nature: the elements, the sun, lightning, the eagle. . . . That is why cowardice (a kind of forsaking one's "personality") is the foremost sin; and that also explains the Indian "individualism", either seeming or real.

As to the knowledge of the "Great Spirit" which man alone of all earthly creation may attain to, Black Elk once defined it as follows: "I am blind and do not see the things of this world; but when the Light comes from Above, it enlightens my heart and I can see, for the Eye of my heart sees everything. The heart is a sanctuary at the centre of which there is a little space, wherein the Great Spirit dwells, and this is the Eye (*Iṣṭa*). This is the Eye of the Great Spirit by which He sees all things and through which we see Him. If the heart is not pure, the Great Spirit cannot be seen, and if you should die in this ignorance, your soul cannot return immediately to the Great Spirit, but it must be purified by wandering about in the world (*Samsāra*). In order to know the centre of the heart where the Great Spirit dwells

you must be pure and good, and live in the manner that the Great Spirit has taught us. The man who is thus pure contains the Universe in the pocket of his heart (*Chante Ognaka*)".<sup>1</sup>

All we have said so far may be taken as an illustration of the Red race's "polysynthetic" genius, which makes itself felt most directly in these peoples' languages: just as the verb embraces in itself all the different elements that go to make up the sentence, so the fundamental conception of the "Great Spirit" embraces all the different elements that go to make up the thought, which means that the Universe is not considered as anything other than "a function of God", and this easily explains why the Indians are suspected of pantheism—always most undiscerningly—by the minds of people who have received a philosophical, rationalistic, conceptualistic education. Nothing illustrates better the "polysynthetic" perspective than the strophes of the *Rgveda* (X. 90) in which the world is likened to a part of Universal Man, *Puruṣa*, the victim of the primordial sacrifice whence all beings originate: "This world is naught but *Puruṣa*", and: "Three quarters of him rose aloft, one quarter of him throve in this world so as to pervade all that therein subsisteth with or without food".

The Sacred Pipe or Calumet is the central expression of this polysynthesis: it is the synthesis of all knowledge,—the "content" of all knowledge being the "Great Spirit", Who Alone "is".

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The Calumet was "revealed", or "sent down from Heaven"; its coming into this world is supernatural, as the sacred accounts bear witness.

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<sup>1</sup> As is often the case, the deep-rooted agreement of the traditional doctrines shows itself here even in forms and details. We might recall also "The Eye of the Heart" in the Plotinian doctrine as also in the Augustinian doctrine; no less remarkable is the close parallelism with the description of *Brahma-pura* as given in the *Chhândogya Upaniṣad*, for instance.

Before giving a summary account of the symbolism of the Calumet, we cannot do better than quote the explanation which was given of it by Black Elk in the first book whereby he became known to the outside world (*Black Elk Speaks*, recorded by John G. Neihardt, William Morrow & Company, New York): "I fill this sacred Pipe with the bark of the red willow; but before we smoke it, you must see how it is made and what it means. These four ribbons hanging here on the stem are the four quarters of the universe. The black one is for the west where the thunder beings live to send us rain; the white one for the north, whence comes the great white cleansing wind: the red one for the east, whence springs the light and where the morning star lives to give men wisdom; the yellow for the south, whence come the summer and the power to grow. But these four spirits are only one Spirit after all, and this eagle feather here is for that One, which is like a father, and also it is for the thoughts of men that should rise high as eagles do. Is not the sky a father and the earth a mother, and are not all living things with feet or wings or roots their children? And this hide upon the mouthpiece here, which should be bison hide, is for the earth, from whence we came and at whose breast we suck as babies all our lives, along with all the animals and birds and trees and grasses. And because it means all this, and more than any man can understand, the Pipe is holy."

When the Indian performs the rite of the Calumet, he greets the sky, the earth and the four cardinal points, either by offering them the pipe stem forward (in accordance with the ritual of the Sioux, for example) or by blowing the smoke towards the different directions, and sometimes also towards the "central fire"<sup>1</sup> which burns in front of

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<sup>1</sup> "The fire of his council or of his great medicine lodge, as some of his songs bear witness, is the oldest of all: it is practically the same as what the Greek philosophers of the school of Pythagoras named *Hestia*,



him; the order of these gestures may vary, but their static plan remains always the same, since it is the doctrinal figure of which the rite is to be the enactment.

In keeping with certain ritual practices, we will begin our enumeration with the West: this "West Wind" brings with it, as we have already seen, thunder and rain, that is, Revelation and also Grace; the "North Wind" purifies and gives strength; from the East comes Light, that is, Knowledge, and these, according to the Indian perspective, go together with Peace; the South is the source of Life and Growth; it is there that the "Good Red Road" begins, the way of welfare and felicity. The Universe thus depends on four primordial determinations—"Water", "Cold", "Light", "Warmth"; the first of these, "Water", is none other than the positive aspect of darkness which should normally stand in opposition to light, just as cold is the opposite of warmth; the positive aspect of darkness is in fact its quality of "shade" which gives protection against the parching strength of the sun and which produces or favours moisture; the sky must grow dark before it can give rain, and God manifests Anger (thunder) before granting Grace of which rain is the natural symbol. As to "Cold" ("the sanctifying and purifying wind which gives strength"), its positive aspect is purity so that the "Purity" of the North may be placed in opposition to the "Warmth" of the South, just as the "Rain" of the West is opposable to the "Light" from the East; the connection between "Cold" and "Purity" is evident: inanimate, "cold" things, that is, minerals—unlike animate, "warm" beings—are not subject

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which burns at the centre of the earth. It is in this central fire that he takes part by mingling his breath with the fire of the sacred tobacco, and it is the same fire which rises with its smoke towards the zenith of the universe or sinks to the nadir, touching the earth; or joins the four winds which, filled with the beautiful life of the high heavens, blow round about our human habitation." (Hartly Burr Alexander: *The Art and Philosophy of the North American Indians*.)

to corruption. The "Light" of the East is, as we have already said, "Knowledge"; and "Warmth" is "Life" and therefore "Love", and also "Goodness", "Beauty", "Happiness".

Before going further, we may reply to an objection which might arise from the fact that in the Sioux mythology, the "Four Winds" seem to correspond to a rather secondary function of the Divinity, which is here divided into four Aspects, each of which contains four subdivisions. The Sioux doctrine, by a remarkable derogation of the ordinary mythological hierarchy, gives a pre-eminence to these four Principles over the other Divinities, showing thereby very clearly that, in the rite of the Calumet or rather in the perspective which is attached to it, the cardinal points represent the four essential Divine Manifestations.

It should moreover never be forgotten that among other Indians this symbolism takes on forms very different from those to be found among the Sioux: thus (to cite a single example) the four Principles are symbolized among the Arapaho by four "Old Men" sprung from the Sun who watch over the inhabitants of the terrestrial world and to whom are attributed symbolically the day (South-East), summer (South-West), night (North-West) and winter (North-East). Finally, it is worth noting that the Quaternary is often considered in the last analysis as constituting a "Duodecuple", each element being considered under three aspects, quite apart from the vertical axis of Heaven and Earth which adds two new elements to the Quaternary, though these are not of the same order. We cannot dwell on all of these variations, and we need only stress the fact that they are independent of the Quaternary Principle which alone concerns us here.

Coming back now to the consideration of the four Principles: it would also be possible to speak of the four "cosmic

Places" in the following terms, here again, as always, starting from the "West" and moving towards the "North": "Moisture", "Cold", "Drought", "Warmth"; the "West's" negative aspect, the correlative of moisture, is darkness, and the "East's" positive aspect, the correlative of drought, is light. The "Thunder-Bird" (*Wakinyan-Tanka*) whose abode is in the West, and who protects the earth and its vegetation against drought and death, is said to flash lightning from its eyes and to thunder with its wings<sup>1</sup>; the analogy with the Revelation on Mount Sinai, which was accompanied by "thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud" (*Exodus*, XIX 16), is all the more striking in that this Revelation took place on a rock, while in the Indian mythology it is precisely the "Rock" which is connected with the "Thunder-Bird", as we shall see from what follows. As to the symbolic connection between Revelation and the West, it may seem unusual and even paradoxical, but it should always be remembered that in Indian symbolism the cardinal points are necessarily positive in their meaning: thus, as we have already said, the West is not the opposite of the East, not "Darkness" and "ignorance", but the positive complement of the East, that is "rain" and "Grace". It might also seem surprising that the Indian tradition should establish a symbolical link between the

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<sup>1</sup> According to Iroquois mythology, "*Hino*, the Spirit of Thunder . . . is the guardian of Heaven. Armed with a powerful bow and arrows of fire (flashes of lightning), he destroys all harmful things. His consort "The Rainbow". . . *Oshadagea*, "The Great Eagle of the Dew", is also at the service of *Hino*. He lives in the Heaven of the West and carries in the hollow of his back a lake of dew. When the maleficent fire sprites destroy all the earth's greenery, *Oshadagea* takes flight and from his outspread wings the beneficent moisture flows drop by drop." (Max Fauchonnet: *Mythologies des deux Ameriques*, in *Mythologie Generale* of the Librairie Larousse).—This association of the lightning with "the Thunder-Bird" is all the more remarkable in that the most diverse traditions connect lightning with Revelation, just as they connect rain with Grace. The eagle and the lightning belong to the same universal symbolism; hence in the Christian tradition the association of the eagle with Saint John, Revealer of the Apocalypse and "Son of Thunder".

"West Wind", bearer of thunder and rain, and the "Rock" which is an "angelic" or "semi-divine" personification of a cosmic Aspect of *Wakan-Tanka*; but this connection is admissible, for in the rock are united the same complementary aspects as in the storms: the terrible aspect by reason of its destructive hardness (the rock is, for the Indians, a symbol of destruction—hence his stone weapons of which the connection with thunderbolts is obvious), and the aspect of Grace through its giving birth to springs which, like the rain, quench the thirst of the land.<sup>1</sup>

There still remains something to be said about the association of the "Winds" with the cardinal points: these four "Winds" are the "Productive Forces" (in the sense of the Sanskrit word *Śakti*) of the "Quarters of the World", and they are conceived of as encircling the whole horizon and deciding the issues of life on earth by their combined influences. The wind is as the "breath" of this earthly world in which we live, so that it represents the "breathing" of the cosmos. The breath is in a certain sense the vehicle of the "soul" or the "spirit", whence the etymological connection

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<sup>1</sup> It should be mentioned here that in the world of the Red Indian the "rocks", namely the Rocky Mountains, lie to the West and give birth to a number of rivers by which the plains are fertilised; this is an example, among many others, of sacred geography.—"When a vision comes from the thunder beings of the West, it comes with terror like a thunder-storm; but when the storm of vision has passed, the world is greener and happier; for whenever the truth of vision comes upon the world, it is like a rain. The world you see, is happier after the terror of the storm." (*Black Elk Speaks, being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Ogalala Sioux*, as told to John Neihardt).—Asceticism springs from the same cosmic connection between "terror" and "Grace", and here again the Indian tradition does not differ from other forms of spirituality: "'To make medicine' is to engage upon a special period of fasting, thanksgiving, prayer and self-denial, even of self-torture. . . . The procedure is entirely a devotional exercise. The purpose is to subdue the passions of the flesh and to improve the spiritual self. The bodily abstinence and the mental concentration upon lofty thoughts cleanses both the body and the soul. . . . Then the individual mind gets closer towards conformity with the mind of the Great Medicine above us." (Wooden Leg—a Cheyenne Indian—in his book: *A Warrior who fought Custer*).

between these words in many languages; but it is also the active vehicle of life, for it nourishes and purifies the blood, life's passive, lower vehicle. The breath is thus both "soul" and "life" and thus it is made in the image of the Divine Word whose creative breath made man himself. (Cf. *Prāṇa* in the Hindu cosmology).

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As we have already mentioned, the cardinal points are associated symbolically with four Divinities which are referred to in many different ways, and which personify four complementary aspects of the universal Spirit; the Spirit unites these aspects in Itself as colours are unified in the light; and this fourfold Spirit "is" *Wakan-Tanka* in the sense that it enjoys identity with God in virtue of the Oneness of Essence, just as the light enjoys essential identity with the sun. According to the cosmology of the Sioux, each of these Divinities (or rather Semi-Divinities) is sub-divided in its turn into four entities which rank one above the other in hierarchy and which are called by the most diverse names, such as "Sun", "Moon", "Bison", "Soul", each entity being an offshoot or reflection of the Spirit in the cosmos; these ramifications are in fact the secondary Angels whose numberless modalities penetrate as far as the confines of creation. The four "Divine Powers" may also clearly be conceived of as beyond manifestation in the purely Principial Reality of *Wakan-Tanka*; they will then represent His fourfold "Polarisation", His Unity or Transcendence being always represented in the rite of the Calumet by the Heaven; or in other terms, the highest Angels are the reflections, in creation, of the essential Divine Qualities, so that the names of these Angels may be applied to these uncreated Qualities, and inversely.

In general, by reason of his polysynthetic or "vertical" perspective (we might say his "primordial" perspective) the Indian will tend to take a simultaneous view of the different

hierarchised aspects of one and the same reality: he will tend to look on them as unified by their co-essentiality, so that, for example, the Earth will not be for him simply perceptible matter or simply the universal substance, but both at the same time, the one in the other; the matter that his senses perceive will be for him the material appearance of the Divine Substance in Its manifestation of materiality. This point of view shows itself in the very symbolism of the "Thunder-Bird" who is *Wakan-Tanka* as seen under the particular aspect of Revelation: like the thunder-bolt, with which it is symbolically associated, the eagle darts across the space of Heaven (of which it is the incarnation) as far as the Earth; in other words, the "Thunder-Bird" forms a link, by its presence, between Heaven and all the lower degrees of "cosmic space".

But let us revert to the symbolism of the "Four Winds": the Sioux draw an analogy between these and the four periods of the cycle, which are symbolized by the four eagle-feathers that adorn the "sacred hoop" used in the "Sun Dance" and on other occasions: the first period is that of the "Stone", the second that of the "Bow", the third that of the "Fire", and the fourth that of the "Pipe", each of these symbols representing the characteristic spiritual means (*upāya*) of the respective period. There are likewise four ages through which every created thing must pass: the first is the South which is yellow and represents the source of all life, and this is the first age in a historical cycle; the second is the West, which is black; the third the North, which is white; and the fourth the East, which is red; earthly humanity is now in the fourth age which will end with a great disaster. This scheme of things which attributes the "Golden Age" to the South and the "Dark or Iron Age" to the East (whereas the other traditional doctrines attribute the "Golden Age" to the North and the "Iron Age" to the West) may seem at first surprising, but two things must here be taken into consideration: firstly, as

regards the "Golden Age" (the *Krita-Yuga*), if it be correct to attribute it to the North inasmuch as the Earthly Paradise stood at the North Pole, it is none the less true that in actual fact that pole is now covered with ice, and that "qualitatively speaking" the South<sup>1</sup> does really correspond to the Paradise and thus to the "Golden Age", so that the symbolism in question may be based on the warmth and fertility of the South just as well as on the Hyperborean situation of the Primordial Garden; secondly, as regards the "Iron Age" (the *Kali-Yuga*), if it be obviously correct to attribute it, according to the geographical perspective of the "Old World", to the West, since it is there that the sun sets and there also that has arisen that final subversion which is spreading its shadows over the whole of humanity, it is none the less true that for the Redskins this same subversion comes from the East; there lies for them what is for the Orientals the "dark West", and thence have come those "palefaced spirits" (*washichun*) by whom the Red race has been practically exterminated; but this does not prevent them from expecting that the universal Saviour, the Messiah awaited by all peoples at the end of the "Dark Age", will also come from the East, so that the solar symbolism of this direction remains intact in the Sioux theory of the four cyclic periods. Moreover, according to the cosmology of the Cheyenne Redskins, the Primordial Tradition originally was established in the Arctic: the earthly Paradise lay in the far North on an island risen from the primordial waters; there, Spring was perpetual and men and animals spoke the same language. Then came tribulations (for example two floods) after which the Red race or rather its primordial ancestors settled definitely in the South which in its turn became a fertile region.

We must not forget to mention here that the Calumet has, besides its fourfold symbolism, a threefold one which

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<sup>1</sup> In the Northern hemisphere.

is in connection with the three worlds and to which correspond respectively the sky, the cardinal points and the earth. The three worlds are also represented, among the Crow Indians, in the form of three rings painted on the central pole of the Sun Dance, this pole signifying the Tree of Life or the Axis of the World, in accordance with the Hyperborean symbolism<sup>1</sup>; they are then interpreted as making up the triad (in ascending order) "body", "soul", "Spirit" or "gross", "subtle", "Pure".

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We now come to another aspect of the rite of the Calumet, and here may be seen the analogy between the smoke of the sacred tobacco (*kinnikinnik*) and incense: in most religions incense is as it were a "human response" to the Divine Presence<sup>2</sup> and the smoke marks the "spiritual presence" of man in the Face of the supernatural<sup>3</sup> Presence of God, as is affirmed by this Iroquois incantation: "Hail! Hail! Hail! Thou Who hast created all things, hear our

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<sup>1</sup> It should be remembered . . . that in diverse traditions the image of the Sun is also connected with the image of the tree, . . . being represented as the fruit of "the Tree of the World"; it leaves its tree at the beginning of the cycle and comes back to rest there at the end so that . . . the tree is in fact "the Station of the Sun". (René Guénon, *L'Arbre du Monde*, in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, February, 1939).

<sup>2</sup> This Presence is symbolized among the Redskins by the eagle feather; the eagle represents the Great Spirit.

<sup>3</sup> This adjective is not a pleonasm, for the "natural" Presence of God is none other than Existence and its diverse expressions and forms, such as the symbols of nature, Sun, Moon, Bison and others, which for the Indian are all *wakan*, sacred.—We will quote here the following deeply symbolic explanation which was given by an Indian chief to the well known ethnologist Alice C. Fletcher: "Everything as it moves, now and then, here and there, makes stops. The bird as it flies stops in one place to make its nest, and in another to rest in its flight. A man when he goes forth stops when he wills. So God has stopped. The sun, which is so bright and beautiful, is one place where He has stopped. The moon, the stars, the winds He has been with. The trees, the animals, are all where He has stopped, and the Indian thinks of these places and sends his prayers there to reach the place where God has stopped and win help and a blessing."



voice. We are obeying Thy Commandments. That which Thou hast created returneth back unto Thee. The smoke of the holy plant riseth up unto Thee, whereby it may be seen that our speech is true."<sup>1</sup>

In the rite of the Calumet man represents the state of "individuation"; space (with its six directions) represents the Universal into which what is individual has—after being transmuted—to be reabsorbed; the smoke disappearing into space, with which it finally identifies itself, marks well this transmutation from the "hard", "opaque" or "formal" into the "dissolved", "transparent" or "formless"; it marks at the same time the unreality of the "ego" and so of the world which, spiritually, is identical with the human microcosm. But this resorption of the smoke into space (which stands for God) transcribes at the same time the Mystery of "Identity" in virtue of which, to use a Sūfic expression, "the Sage is not created"; it is only in illusion that man is a "weight" cut out of space and isolated in it: in reality he "is" that space and he must "become what he is", as the Hindu Scriptures say.<sup>2</sup> By absorbing, together with the sacred smoke, the "Perfume of Grace", and by breathing himself out with it towards the unlimited, man spreads himself supernaturally throughout the "Divine Space", so to speak: but at the same time God is represented by the fire which consumes the tobacco. The tobacco itself represents man or,

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Paul Radin in his *Histoire de la Civilisation Indienne*.

<sup>2</sup> The symbolism of the Tibetan Buddhist "prayer-wheels" is inversely analogous to that of the Calumet: whereas in relation to the Calumet, the Divine Reality is to be found in the directions of space towards which tend (starting from the centre which is the state of individuation) the spiritual aspirations of the individual, the "prayer-wheel" represents the Divine Reality in the form of a revealed Utterance or *mantra* which is fixed in space by the sacred letters that transcribe it and which through its rotation blesses the Universe as manifested in space. According to an Upaniṣad: "*Brahma* is to the north, to the south, to the east, to the west, at the zenith and at the nadir."—In the same way the Quran says: "Where-soever ye turn, there is the face of *Allah*."

from the macrocosmic point of view, the Universe; space is here "incarnate" in the fire of the Calumet, just as the cardinal points are united, according to another symbolism, in the Central Fire.

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According to Black Elk, "everything an Indian does is done in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles and everything tries to be round. In the old days when we were a strong and happy people, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation, and so long as the hoop was unbroken, the people flourished. The flowering tree was the living centre of the hoop, and the circle of the four quarters nourished it. The East gave peace and light, the South gave warmth, the West gave rain, and the North with its cold and mighty wind gave strength and endurance. This knowledge came to us from the outer (transcendent or universal) World together with our religion. Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind, in its greatest power, whirls. Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours . . . Our tepees were round like the nests of birds, and these were always set in a circle, the nation's hoop, a nest of many nests, where the Great Spirit meant us to hatch our children." (*Black Elk Speaks*).

All the static forms of existence are thus as it were determined by a "concentric" archetype, whether they be material or mental: centred round his qualitative, "totemic", almost impersonal "ego"; the Indian tends towards independence and so towards indifference with regard to both world and life; he surrounds himself with silence as with a magic circle and this silence is sacred as being the vehicle of the heavenly influences. It is from this silence (of which the natural support is solitude) that the Indian draws spiritual strength: his

ordinary prayer is unvoiced: what it requires is not thought but the "consciousness of the Spirit", and this "consciousness" is immediate and formless like the vault of heaven.<sup>1</sup>

If the Great Spirit acts always "in circles", He acts also, in another respect, always "in fours", as may be seen from the directions of space and the cycles of time (and then the circle turns into the *Swastika* which is an important Redskin symbol): that is why the Indian, whose course of life lies as it were between the central point and unlimited space, makes static things according to the circular or unitive principle, and dynamic things (actions) according to the quaternary principle<sup>2</sup>, that is, in conformity with the four cardinal virtues which are for him: courage, endurance, generosity, and fidelity. This profound structure of Indian life signifies that the Red man has no intention of "fixing" himself on this earth where everything, according to the law of stabilisation and also of condensation ("petrification", one might say) is liable to crystallize; and this explains the Indian's aversion for houses, especially stone ones, and also the absence of a writing which, from this perspective, would "fix" and "kill" the sacred flow of the Spirit. The European civilisation, on the other hand, in both its dynamic and static forms, is thoroughly sedentary and urban: it is thus anchored in space where it spreads itself quantitatively, whereas the Indian civilisation has its pivot as it were outside space in the unlocalized, principial centre; its expansivity is therefore

<sup>1</sup> Needless to say, such an attitude of adoration presupposes a mental heredity which no mere individual initiative could possibly replace.

<sup>2</sup> The circle has also a dynamic symbolism which goes with the static symbolism of the cross (we are not referring to the square—the static form *par excellence*—since it does not enter into this nomadic perspective). If the cross represents, not a centrifugal tendency, but the cardinal points, the circle will represent, not a concentric tendency, but the circular movement of the "Four Winds" about the world, that is, the passage of the four cosmic Principles from potency to act; the same image is to be found in the *Swastika*, where the plain cross is obviously static and the hooks dynamic and "rotatory".

"qualitative", in the sense that it is pure movement, symbolizing the unlimited, and not a quantitative, "mercenary" setting of boundaries to the extension of space. It should be clearly understood in this connection that Christianity, like other religions of the "Old World", seems to fix the "Celestial" on the earthly plane and builds sanctuaries in the most static of materials, stone; the religion of the Indians, on the other hand, integrates the earthly (the "spatial") with the All Present Celestial, and that is why the Red man's sanctuary is everywhere; that is also why the earth should remain intact, virgin and sacred, as when it left the Divine Hands,—since only what is pure reflects the Eternal.<sup>1</sup> The Indian is nothing of a "pantheist", nor does he imagine for one moment that God is in the world; but he knows that the world is mysteriously plunged in God.

What has just been said enables one to understand why Indian art is of an altogether primordial simplicity; its language is concentrated, direct and bold; like the Indian

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<sup>1</sup> This perspective explains the great "nomadic revolutions" which, starting from the Mongolian steppes with an unheard of impetuosity, were to have swept the towns—places of corruption and "petrification"—from the surface of the earth. In any case, it cannot be denied that the materialistic and quantitative civilization of the modern world represents a peak of urban "incrustation", and that, but for sedentarism, such a civilization could never have come into existence; in fact it crushes nomadism everywhere, or rather, it crushes everything; it will end by crushing even itself. Let us add that the ring of Ghengiz Khan had on it the *Suastika* which, as we have already mentioned, is also often to be found in the symbolic art of the Red Indians. As to the attitude of the Red Indian towards nature on the one hand and cities on the other, Tacitus describes exactly analogous traits among the ancient Germans: "They think it would be degrading to the majesty of the Gods to imprison them between walls and to represent them by means of a human figure: they consecrate the woods and forests to them, and invoke, by the names of the divinities, that Mystery which they view solely with reverential fear" (. . . *deorumque nominibus appellant Secretum illud, quod sola reverentia vident*). "It is well known that the Germans have no cities and will not even tolerate that their dwellings be touching one another."—Ammonius Marcellus, a fourth century author, reports that the Germans regarded the Roman cities with horror, as being prisons and tombs, and that, after having captured them, they abandoned them.

himself (a very noble type of humanity and also one of the most powerfully original), his art is both "qualitative" and spontaneous; it is precise in its symbolism, while keeping at the same time a surprising freshness. It serves as a "framework" for the person of man, and this explains the high quality of the Indian art of clothing: his majestic head-dresses (above all his great array of eagle feathers), his garments streaming with fringes and embroidered with solar symbols, the bright-patterned mocassins which seem designed to take away from the feet all heaviness and all uniformity, the feminine robes of an exquisite simplicity; this Red Indian art is certainly one of the most vigorous expressions of human genius.

We have seen that Nature (landscape, sky, stars, elements, wild animals) is a necessary support for the Indian tradition, just as are temples for other religions<sup>1</sup>; all the limitations imposed on Nature by artificial, heavy-weighting, unmoveable works (limitations that are likewise imposed on man through his becoming a slave to these works) are thus sacrileges, even "idolatries", and they carry within them the seeds of death. The result of this outlook is that the destiny of the Red man is tragic in the proper sense of the term: tragedy is a desperate situation caused not by chance but by the fatal clash of two principles. The crushing of the Indian race is tragic because the Red man could only conquer or die; it is the spiritual basis of this alternative which confers on the destiny of the Red race an aspect of grandeur and martyrdom.<sup>2</sup> It was not

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<sup>1</sup> As a "keeper of the Calumet" said to our friend Joseph Epes Brown, God shows His goodness by leaving nature intact: "Although we have been crushed by the white man in every possible way, we still have much cause to be thankful to the Great Spirit, for even in this period of darkness His work in nature remains unchanged and is a continual reminder of the Divine Presence."

<sup>2</sup> It is hard to say which was the more ignoble, the treacherous methods employed during the white expansion westwards, or the treatment inflicted on the Indians after their defeat. "The attempt to suppress

simply because they were the weaker side that the Red men succumbed; they did so because they represented a spirit which was incompatible with the white man's commercialism.<sup>1</sup> This great drama might be defined as the struggle, not only between a materialistic civilization and another that was chivalrous and spiritual, but also between urban civilization (in the strictly human and evil sense of this term, with all its implications of "artifice" and "servility") and the kingdom

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native leadership and Indian social controls began under the agent who came to Pine Ridge in 1879. . . . Only through the acceptance of stock-raising and settlement on farm tracts, he sincerely felt, could the Indian adjust to his new situation. However, like all people of his time, the agent also felt that this must be accompanied by a complete abandonment of Indian custom. Thus, when the Indians seemed to cling too tenaciously to camping by band groups, holding council by themselves, or being uncooperative, he withheld rations or utilized the police to force a change. . . . The undermining of native controls and native leadership was followed later by official regulations which forbade native dances, ceremonies, and pagan customs. . . . Children were virtually kidnapped to force them into government schools, their hair was cut, and their Indian clothes thrown away. They were forbidden to speak in their own language . . . those who persisted in clinging to their old ways and those who ran away and were recaptured were thrown into jail. Parents who objected were also jailed. Where possible, children were kept in school year after year to avoid the influence of their families." (Gordon Macgregor: *Warriors without Weapons*).

<sup>1</sup> "Cain, who killed his brother Abel, the herdsman, and built himself a city, prefigures modern civilization, one that has been described from within as a "murderous machine, with no conscience and no ideals" (G. La Piana), "neither human nor normal nor Christian" (Eric Gill), and in fact "an anomaly, not to say a monstrosity" (R  ne Gu  non). It has been said: "The values of life are slowly ebbing. There remains the show of civilization, without any of its realities" (A. N. Whitehead). Criticisms such as these could be cited without end. Modern civilization, by its divorce from any principle, can be likened to a headless corpse of which the last motions are convulsive and insignificant. It is not, however, of suicide, but of murder that we propose to speak." (Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: *Am I My Brother's Keeper?*)—"Savages we call them, because their manners differ from ours, which we think the perfection of civility; they think the same of theirs. . . . Having few artificial wants, they have abundance of leisure for improvement by conversation. Our laborious manner of life, compared with theirs, they esteem slavish and base; and the learning, on which we value ourselves, they regard as frivolous and useless." (Benjamin Franklin: *Remarks concerning the Savages of North America*).

of Nature considered as the majestic, pure, unlimited apparel of the Divine Spirit. And it is from this idea of the final victory of Nature (final because it is primordial) that those Indians who have remained faithful to their ancestors draw their inexhaustible patience in the face of the misfortunes of their race; Nature, of which they feel themselves to be embodiments, and which is at the same time their sanctuary, will end by conquering this artificial and sacriligious world, for it is the Garment, the Breath, the very Hand of the Great Spirit.

## CHAPTER X

### WHAT CAN THE EAST OFFER TO THE WEST?

ASSUREDLY there are no such things as "problems of our time" in the philosophers' sense of the expression, that is to say there is no thought that one could describe as "new" in its very foundations; there are however some questions that arose from the moment when "science" and "faith" began to part company and which "belong to our time" because they have never ceased to engage people's attention.

Faith is the accepting of that which we do not see, or rather, of that which transcends the experience of the average man; science is the experience of that which we do see, or at least of that whereof we can have an empirical knowledge. Traditional faith has been shaken or lost for reasons that are both subjective and objective; the "intellectual worldliness" inaugurated at the time of the Renaissance and voiced by Descartes brought as its consequence a general weakening of contemplative intelligence and of the religious instinct, while new facts, all manner of discoveries and inventions, came in to profit from this weakening and seemed to inflict a more or less flagrant contradiction upon the propositions of faith. Otherwise put, modern man was not—and is not—"intelligent" enough to offer intellectual resistance to such specious suggestions as are liable to follow from contact with facts which, though natural, normally lie beyond the range of common experience; in order to combine, in one and the same consciousness, both the religious symbolism of the sky



and the astronomical fact of the Milky Way, an intelligence is required that is more than just rational, and this brings us back to the crucial problem of intellection and, as a further consequence, to the problem of gnosis and esotericism.

However, the modern scepticism, in order to take root, does not always require the prior misdeeds of cartesianism; every sort of "worldliness" is a breach open to admit the spirit of doubt and the denial of the supernatural, aided by circumstances. Experience goes to prove that no people, however contemplative, is able in the long run to withstand the psychological effects of the modern discoveries, a fact that clearly demonstrates their "abnormality" in relation to human nature generally; in Europe the hostility of the mediaeval Church towards the new astronomical theses does not appear, in the light of subsequent events, to have been altogether unreasonable, to say the least of it. It is evident that no kind of knowledge is bad in principle or in itself: but many forms of knowledge can be harmful in practice as soon as they cease to correspond to the hereditary experience of man and are imposed on him without his being spiritually prepared to receive them; the human soul finds difficulty in coping with facts that are not offered to its experience in the ordinary course of nature. The same holds true of art: the latter has need of limits imposed by nature, at least in so far as it is the appanage of a collectivity, such being "passive" and "unconscious" by definition; one has but to put at the disposition of a people or a caste the resources of machinery and the chemical industry, and their art, regarded in the broadest sense, will be corrupted, not in its every manifestation of course, but in so far as it belongs to all. This does not mean to say that the majority of an artistic people is totally lacking in discernment, but that the seductive attraction of novel possibilities proves in the long run more powerful than hereditary taste; fineness of soul

yields to the clamour of what is easy and offered in quantity, just as happens on the intellectual plane and other planes besides. Human nature is weak and prone to corruption; it is not possible for a whole people to be holy or even simply clear-sighted.

Howbeit, the tragic dilemma of the modern mind results from the fact that the majority of men are not capable of grasping *a priori* the compatibility of the symbolic expressions of tradition with the material observations of science; these observations incite modern man to want to understand the "why and wherefore" of all things, but he wishes this "wherefore" to remain as external and easy as scientific phenomena themselves, or in other words, he wants all the answers to be on the level of his own experiences; and as these are purely material ones, his consciousness closes itself in advance against all that might transcend them.

One of the great errors of our time is to speak of the "failure" of religion or the religions; this amounts to imputing to the truth our own refusal to accept it and at the same time to denying man both his liberty and his intelligence. The latter depends, in large measure, on his will, therefore on freewill, in the sense that the will can contribute towards rendering intelligence effective or else towards paralysing it; it is therefore not without good reason that mediaeval theologians situated heresy in the will. Intelligence can in fact slip into error, but its own nature is such as not to allow it to resist truth indefinitely; for this to happen the intervention of a volitional factor is required or, to be more precise, of a passionnal factor, namely prejudice, a sentimental interest, individualism under its many forms. Every error contains an element of irrational "mysticism", a tendency that has nought to do with concepts but which uses concepts or invents them. Behind every philosophical opinion is to be found some particular "savour" or "colour"; errors are born of psychic

“hardenings”, “dissipations”, “explosions” or “heavinesses” and these are, each in its own way, obstacles to the shining forth of Intellect and to the vision of the “Eye of the Heart”.

The darkening of our world—whether it be a matter of the West properly speaking or of its extensions into the East or elsewhere—is apparent also in the fact that mental nimbleness for the most part goes hand in hand with intellectual shallowness: people are in the habit of treating concepts like mental playthings that commit one to nothing; ideas no longer “bite” on the intelligence and the latter “glides” over concepts without giving itself time to “grasp” them. The modern spirit proceeds “along the surface”, hence a continual toying with mental images without awareness of the part these really play; the traditional spirit, on the other hand, proceeds “in depth”, whence arise doctrines that may be apparently “dogmatic” but which none the less remain fully satisfying and effective.

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From the doctrinal point of view, the most urgent need at present is to rediscover the spiritual science of exegesis, that is to say the metaphysical and mystical interpretation of the Scriptures. The principles of this science, which for its handling presupposes on every count a highly intuitive intelligence and not simply a mental acuteness, have been expounded, for Christendom, by Origen and others, and put into practice by the Fathers and the greatest Saints. In other words, what the West lacks is an intellectuality founded, not on academic erudition and philosophic scepticism, but upon intellectual intuition as actualised by the Holy Spirit on the basis of an exegesis that takes into account all levels of reality and understanding; this exegesis itself implies the science of symbolism which, for its part extends into all the realms of formal expression and especially into sacred art; the latter

includes the liturgical art, in the broadest sense, as well as art properly so-called. Since the traditional East has never departed from this manner of regarding things, a proper comprehension of its metaphysical teachings, its commentaries, its symbolisms and its arts would be, for the West, of vital interest.

But there is yet another level on which the East is rich in teachings—this is the level of spiritual life, of the “techniques” of realization; we are referring not to those which are exclusively bound up with a given traditional form, but to those which lend themselves to harmonious integration in any perspective or symbolism, this, thanks to the unity of truth itself and the homogeneity of the human species. We are thinking especially, on the one hand, of a more “organic” influence exerted by intellectual knowledge on spiritual life and, on the other hand, of a renewal of incantatory methods, such as are described for instance in the “Way of a Pilgrim”<sup>1</sup>; this does not differ, in a final analysis, from the way of the Desert Fathers. From the above example it will be seen that what we have in mind, for the Christian, is a return to his own sources and not an “orientalisation” of the West.

Lastly, on the most external plane, there is the conception of life, of social facts, of civilization in general: here again, the Oriental conception agrees with that of the ancient West and of every other traditional society. In all these questions it is important to bear in mind the following: there is no question, for the West, of turning “backwards” purely and simply, for one can never rejoin one’s point of departure. On the contrary, what is needed is to combine the normal attitudes, which are timeless like truth itself, with such experiences of modern times as may be utilisable.

<sup>1</sup> Anonymous Russian works of the mid-nineteenth century which afford a vivid insight into the workings, at a popular level, of *japa yoga* under its Christian form. An English translation (two volumes) has been published by S.P.C.K. in 1954.

On the other hand, it should be pointed out that if the West needs the East, the latter also has need of the West—not of the West as such, of course, but of such few Westerners as have managed to integrate their experiences of the modern world in a traditional and spiritual outlook that might, if one likes, be described as “oriental” or “mediaeval”. When in contact with the West, Orientals generally display an astonishing lack of suspicion and this can be explained by the fact that the modern world, while being a “necessary evil”, is not a normal possibility. Now the Western elite to which we are referring is endowed with a “discernment of spirits” and a sense of proportion that often are lacking in Orientals; the latter, however, today stand greatly in need of these particular qualities, not on the still uncontaminated soil of their own civilisation, where they understand what they are doing, but outside it in a chaotic world that violates every framework and insinuates itself everywhere.

It will be readily understood that when we speak of gifts from the East to the West, we do so without any illusions, since one does not have to be a prophet to foresee that the West is not going to be saved as a whole; nor do the prospects of the East look much more hopeful, at least during the present cycle of humanity. On the other hand the individual both of East and West—together with the spiritual collectivity on which he depends—still keeps all his interior liberty and, with it, must accept his full share of responsibility.

## CHAPTER XI

### GNOSIS, LANGUAGE OF THE SELF

THERE are various ways of expressing or defining the difference between gnosis and love—or between *jñāna* and *bhakti*—but here we wish to consider one criterion only, and it is this:—for the “volitional” or “affective” man (the *bhakta*) God is “He” and the *ego* is “I”, whereas for the “gnostic” or “intellective” man (the *jñāni*)<sup>1</sup> God is “I”—or “Self”—and the *ego* is “he” or “other”.<sup>2</sup> It will also be immediately apparent why it is the former and not the latter perspective that determines all religious dogmatism: it is because the majority of men start out from certainty about the *ego* rather than about the Absolute. Most men are individualists and consequently but little suited to make “a concrete abstraction” of their empirical “I”, a process which

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<sup>1</sup> We would as readily have said “the theosopher”, only this word might give rise to confusions. That the terms “gnostic” or “theosopher” should have fallen into discredit is a bad sign, not, certainly, for men like Clement of Alexandria or Boehme who used them, but for that world which has occasioned and sanctioned such discredit. The same applies to the word “intellectual” the meaning of which has become something quite trivial.

<sup>2</sup> It is true that most of the sapiential doctrines, in taking account of the *ego* as a fact and inasmuch as they conform to “the letter” of the Revelation from which they derive, refer to the Absolute as “He” just like the “dualists” of the way of love, but this is hardly more than a question of dialectic which in no way modifies the fundamental perspective, as we have explained elsewhere: (See section on *Vedānta*). Moreover the *Advaita Vedānta*, which is the most direct possible expression of gnosis, does not exclude “objectivist” formulations of the Principle, such as *Brahmā*, *Śiva* and other divine Names.

is an intellectual and not a moral one: in other words, few have the gift of impersonal contemplation—for it is of this we are speaking—such as will allow “God to think” in us, if such an expression is permissible. The nature of pure intellection will be better understood from considering the following:—Intellect, which is One, presents itself in three fundamental aspects—at least in so far as we are situated in the “separative illusion” as is the case for every creature as such—namely, first the divine Intellect, which is Light and pure Act; secondly the cosmic Intellect, which is a receptacle or mirror in relation to God and light in relation to man; and thirdly the human Intellect, which is a mirror in relation to both of the foregoing and light in relation to the individual soul<sup>1</sup>; one must be careful, therefore, to distinguish in the Intellect—the divine Intellect excepted—an “uncreated” aspect which is essential and a “created” aspect which is “accidental” or rather “contingent”.<sup>2</sup> This synthetic view of things “results”, one might say from the principle of non-alterity: that which is not “other” in any respect whatsoever is “identical” under the relationship here being considered, so much so that intelligence as such—whether it be the intelligence of a man conforming to truth or that of a plant causing it irresistibly to turn towards the light—“is” the intelligence of God; intelligence is only “human” or “vegetable” in relation to specific limitations, and similar considerations apply to every positive quality, and therefore to all virtues, which are always those of God, not of course in the accidental

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<sup>1</sup> Words of the Gospel such as “I am the light of the world” or “No man cometh to the Father but by me” are applicable in all these three senses.

<sup>2</sup> The mystery of “universal Spirit” (*Er-Ruh*) consists, in Islam, in not being able to say of it either that it is “created” or that it is “uncreated”; the same mystery is to be met with in that Intellect we have called “human” and which Meister Eckhart also defined in an ambiguous manner.

conditions that narrow their scope, but in their content or essence.

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From these considerations it can be seen that the great Gospel virtues—charity, humility, poverty, childlikeness—have their final end in the “Self”<sup>1</sup>: they represent so many negations of that ontological “bubble” which is the *ego*, negations that are not individualist and thereby contradictory<sup>2</sup>, but intellective; that is, their point of departure is the very Self, in conformity with the innermost nature of things. In a similar way, if a sage cannot be satisfied, in a final sense, with any created bliss—“the (created) Paradise is a prison for the Sūfi”—this is not due to any pretension or ingratitude on his part, far from it, but simply because the Intellect tends towards its own Source, or because the Self in us “wants to be delivered”. If Christ “is God”, that is because the Intellect—“come down from Heaven”—“is the Self”; and in that sense, all genuine religions are “Christian”: each one postulates, on the one hand, the uncreated Intellect—or the Logos, “uncreated Word” of God, which comes to the same thing if one takes into account the “radiation” of Intellect—and on the other hand it postulates the earthly manifestation of that Word and the deliverance procured through it; every complete tradition postulates, in the final analysis, extinction

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<sup>1</sup> The same could be said of the commandments of the Hebrew Decalogue: in a final analysis each one of them marks an aspect of the Self and each transgression likewise reveals an aspect of the *ego* as such. The “chosen people” corresponds to the soul that is “naturally” idolatrous and rebellious but has been “supernaturally” redeemed by the Messiah, who is Grace or Intellect.

<sup>2</sup> A complex of guilt and a “set” attitude of “humility” are the commonest expressions of this contradiction. An attitude is false in proportion as it runs counter to truth; true humility, the kind that is most efficacious, is an impersonal “non-pride” which remains independent of the alternative “humiliation—flattery” and avoids all unhealthy preoccupation with the “I”. Fundamental virtues are centred in God, not man.



of the *ego* in favour of the divine "I", an extinction for which the sacred Law provides an elementary framework, though the Law must remain "dualistic" in its common letter to meet the needs of the majority and consequently for reasons of social psychology. "Internally" every religion is the doctrine of the one Self and its earthly manifestation, as also the way leading to the abolition of the false self, or the way of the mysterious reintegration of our "personality" in the celestial Prototype; "externally" the religions amount to "mythologisms" or, to be more exact, to symbolisms designed for differing human receptacles and displaying, by this limitation, not a contradiction *in divinis* but on the contrary a mercy. A doctrine or a Way is exoteric in proportion to its need to take account of individualism (which is the fruit not so much of passion itself as of the hold exerted by passion upon thought) and to veil the equation of "Intellect" and "Self" under a mythological or moral "imagery", and that, irrespective of whether an historical element is combined in that imagery or not: and that doctrine is esoteric in proportion as it communicates the very essence of our universal position, our situation midway between nothingness and Infinity. Esotericism looks to the nature of things and not merely to our human eschatology; it views the Universe not from the human standpoint but "from the standpoint of God".<sup>1</sup>

The exoteric mentality, with its one-sided logic and its somewhat "passion-tainted rationality", scarcely conceives that there are questions to which the answer is at once "yes"

<sup>1</sup> "It is for certain chosen men, who have been allowed to pass from faith to gnosis, that the sacred mysteries of wisdom have been preserved under the veil of parables" (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, VI, 126). This means, not that the parables do not contain a sense which is designed for all Christians while having to be hidden provisionally from unbelievers, but that they are at the same time the vehicles of a sense that is genuinely gnostic or metaphysical, and thereby incomprehensible to the majority of Christians themselves. Christ's command not to cast pearls before swine nor to give what is sacred to dogs cannot have a meaning that is merely limited in time or reduced to a question of what is externally opportune.

and "no"; it is always afraid of "falling" into "dualism"; "pantheism", "quietism" or something of this kind. In metaphysics as in psychology it is sometimes necessary to resort to ambiguous answers; for example, to the question: the world, "is it" God? we reply: "no", if by the "world" is understood ontological manifestation as such, that is to say in its aspect of existential or demiurgic relativity; "yes", if by "world" is understood manifestation in so far as it is causally or substantially divine, since outside of God nothing can be; in the first case, God is exclusive and transcendent Principle, and in the second, total Reality or universal and inclusive Substance. God alone "is"; the world is a limited "divine aspect", for it cannot—on pain of absurdity—be a nothingness on its own level. To affirm on the one hand that the world has no "divine quality", and on the other that it is real apart from God and that it never ceases so to be, amounts to admitting two Divinities, two Realities, two Absolutes.

That which is "incarnation" for Christianity is "revelation" or "descent" for the other two monotheistic religions. The truth that only the divine manifestation "is the Self", to the exclusion of every human counterfeit, becomes exoterically: only such and such a divine manifestation—to the exclusion of all others—is the Self. It could also be said, on the plane of the microcosm, that the Intellect alone, and no other human faculty, is the Self—neither reason nor imagination nor memory nor feeling nor the faculties of sensory perception—although, viewed as existential structure, everything reflects or "is" the Self in some way or another. This exclusive value attaching to "incarnation" plainly also bears, besides its spiritual significance, a literal meaning historically, which applies when one considers the particular human cosmos where this divine manifestation has taken place, that is to say, in the case of Christ, the world of the Roman Empire and, in a still larger sense, the world of those whom the particular grace of Christ

has "chosen", regardless of their country of origin; but the literalist interpretation becomes unacceptable as soon as an attempt is made to add some fact or other, be it even a sacred fact, to metaphysical truth, as if the latter were incomplete without it—whereas all possible facts are already included in that truth—and as if metaphysical truth were subject to time. To take a second example: the Koranic affirmation that "God alone is God" means that there is no Self but the Self; exoterically however this statement implies that God could not manifest Himself as such "outside Himself", which amounts to rejecting the phenomenon of "incarnation"; but in every case of this kind, esotericism "restores" the total truth on the plane of principles. In fact, the essential difference between Christian and Islamic gnosis is this: whereas Christian gnosis projects the mystery of the God-man—and thereby the mystery of the Trinity—into the soul of the gnostic, as is shown for example by certain Eckhartian texts, Sūfism, for its part, sees "unification" (*tawhid*) or the "unity of Existence" or, better still, the unity of Universal Reality (*wahdat El-Wujud*, sometimes translated as "Supreme Identity") as resulting from the very nature of the Divine Unity.<sup>1</sup>

The exoteric distinction between "the true religion" and "false religions" is replaced, for the gnostic, by the distinction between essence and forms.<sup>2</sup> The sapiential perspective alone

<sup>1</sup> The Islamic formula *La ilaha illa Llah* means, according to gnosis, that "there is no 'me' except it be 'I'"—therefore no real or positive *ego* except the Self—a meaning which also springs from expressions such as the *Ana-l-Haqq* ("I am the Truth") of El Hallaj or the *Subhani* ("Glory to Me") of Bayezid. The Prophet himself enunciated the same mystery in the following terms: "He who has seen me, has seen the Truth (God)". (That is to say: God cannot be seen except through His receptacle or, in a more general but less direct sense, through His symbol), and also: "I am He and He is I, save that I am who I am, and He is who He is".—"I have been charged with fulfilling my mission since the best of the ages of Adam (the origins of the world), from one age to another until this age where I am."

<sup>2</sup> If in relation to the pole "subject" gnosis is the doctrine of the Self, in relation to the pole "object" it will be the doctrine of the Essence:

is an esotericism in the absolute sense, or in other words, it alone is necessarily and integrally esoteric, because it alone reaches beyond all relativities.

The way of love is more or less esoteric as seen from the angle of social religion, and more or less exoteric as seen from the angle of gnosis, and this moreover explains certain somewhat ambiguous aspects of Christianity; but one must take care not to confuse the aspect "love" in gnosis itself with doctrines and methods of a specifically *bhaktic*, and therefore "dualist" and emotive character.

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God is "Light" "before" He is "Heat", if it may be so expressed; gnosis "precedes" love, or rather, love "follows" gnosis, since the latter includes love after its own fashion, whereas love is not other than the bliss that has "come forth" from gnosis. One can love something false, without love ceasing to be what it is; but one cannot "know" falsehood in a similar way, that is to say knowledge cannot be under illusion as to its object without ceasing to be what it is; error always implies a privation of knowledge, whereas sin does not imply a privation of will. Therein lies a most important application of the symbolism of the Adamic "androgyne" and of the creation of Eve: it is only following the "coming forth" of love outside knowledge—whence the polarisation of "intelligence" and "will"—that the temptation and fall could—or can—take place; in one sense, the rational faculty became detached from Intellect through the intrusion of will, seduced by "the serpent" and rendered "free" from below, that is to say rendered capable of making choice between true and false; choice of falsehood having once become possible, it was bound to present itself as a seduction of torrential force;

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"That Knowledge which sees the One Indestructible in all beings, the One Indivisible in all separate lives, may be truly called Pure Knowledge." (*Bhagavad-Gītā*, XVII, 20, translated by Śrī Purohit Swāmī, Faber 1935.)

reason, mother of the "wisdom according to the flesh" is the "natural child" issued from Adam's sin. Here the serpent represents what Hindus understand by *tamas*<sup>1</sup>, that tendency which is "downward", "towards obscurity", "compressive" and at the same time "dispersive" and "dissolving" and which on contact with the human becomes personified as Satan. The question: "why does evil exist?" amounts, to all intents and purposes, to asking why there is an existence; the serpent is to be found in Paradise because Paradise exists. Paradise without the serpent would be God.

\*                      \*                      \*                      \*

Man complains of his sufferings, such as separation and death; but has he not inflicted them *a priori* upon the Self, by his very egoity? Is not individuation a separation from the divine "I" and is not the *ego* itself a death in respect of infinite Life? It will be objected that we are not responsible for our existence; but man ceaselessly recreates, in his actions, this responsibility which he thinks he does not bear; in this, taken together with the foregoing considerations, lies the deeper meaning of original sin.<sup>2</sup> Man suffers because he wishes to

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth reminding the reader that the negative aspects of *tamas* which here are in question are but half the story: under its positive aspect *tamas* can also act as a principle of stability, in the absence of which no world could hold together, nor any object or being endure for a moment. It is a common mistake to regard *tamas* as tantamount to evil or ignorance as such, whereas it is one of the constituent qualities of Existence, affecting everything contained therein in continually varying proportions, and this is true of things that are deemed beneficial as well as harmful. (Note to the English edition.)

<sup>2</sup> There are some apparent heresies that are not false in themselves, but refer to an "ontological stratum" lying deeper than that of ordinary theological concepts: the refusal to attribute an absolute validity to "original sin" proceeds, when it has an adequate motive, from a more fundamental and more "neutral" vision of our human reality, one which however is less accessible to a given mentality and therefore also less opportune for a given morality; similarly, "quietism", in so far as it contains a legitimate element, stands nearer to contemplation and gnosis than does the accumulating of merits; "there is no lustral water like unto Knowledge" says the Law of Manu. It can be regretted, without

be "self" in opposition to "Self", and Christ effaces this fundamental "sin" by taking on Himself its resultant suffering. He is the Self holding out a hand to "me"; man must "lose his life", the life of the *ego*, in order to keep it, the life of the Self. Under His solar aspect—implying the warmth of love as also the light of wisdom—Christ is the Self that unites and absorbs all beings. The Self became *ego* in order that the *ego* might become Self; the divine "Subject" became cosmic "object" because "object" must once again become "subject".<sup>1</sup> The Self alone is "itself"; the *ego* is "other", hence its initial unbalance and its insatiability: it never ceases its search for itself; in whatever it does, it is in pursuit of that transcendent and absolute "Me" in which the beatitudes are intrinsic and permanent instead of being scattered about a world that is endlessly deceptive. "The Kingdom of God is within you."

If "that which is born of the Spirit is spirit", this is because Spirit is Self and because there is no other knowing or loving Subject in the infinite Blessedness; similarly, if he that is "born of the Spirit"<sup>2</sup> is like the wind of which "thou

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departing from realism, that Western theology has not known a grading of truths according to differing levels of validity: having chosen but one level, more or less, namely the level of what was opportune for the collectivity, this theology firstly impoverished itself and then indirectly provoked "explosions" which have ended by threatening its very existence.

<sup>1</sup> "And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not": the *ego* has not understood that its own immortal reality—or that of the Intellect—is none other than the Self. "That which ye shall have done to one of these little ones, have ye done unto Me": this is the enunciation, as Coomaraswamy so justly remarked, of the cosmic reverberation of the Self, who is "the one and only transmigrant" according to Śaṅkara.

<sup>2</sup> "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John III, 3-7)—"Water is looked on by many traditions as the original medium of beings, and the reason lies in its symbolism . . . by which water represents *Mūla Prakṛti*; in a superior sense and by transposition, water is Universal Possibility itself; he

knowest neither whence it comes nor whither it goes", this is because, being identified with the Self, he is without origin; he has come forth from the chain of cosmic causations and dwells in the Changeless. Similarly again, a reference to the Self—apart from other meanings—is to be seen in these words: "None has gone up to Heaven but he who came down from Heaven . . .". To "go up to Heaven" is to "become One-self", that is to say, to become that which one had never really ceased to be, in the sense that the essence of the *ego* is the Self, that "Life" which we can only purchase by losing the life of "me",<sup>1</sup>

For Socrates, in Plato's dialogues, the "true philosopher" is one who consecrates himself to "studying the separation of soul from body, or the liberation of the soul", and "who is always occupied in the practice of dying"; it is one who withdraws from the bodily—and therefore from all that which, in the *ego*, is the shadow or echo of the surrounding world—in order to be nothing other than absolutely pure Soul, immortal Soul, Self: "The Soul-in-itself must contemplate Things-in-themselves" (*Phaedo*). Thus the criterion of truth—and the basis of conviction, this reverberation of Light in the "outer man"—is Truth in itself, the prephenomenal Intelligence by which

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that is "born of water" becomes a "son of the Virgin", therefore also an adopted brother of Christ and co-heir to the Kingdom of God. Besides, if one observes the fact that "spirit" . . . is the Hebrew *Ruahh* (here associated with water as a complementary principle, as at the beginning of Genesis) and that *Ruahh* at the same time corresponds to air, one will recognise in this the idea of purification by the elements . . ." (René Guénon, *Man and His Becoming according to the Vedānta*, Chapter XX, footnote).

<sup>1</sup> "With Christ I must be buried," said St. Gregory of Nazianza, "with Christ I must rise again, and with Christ I must inherit; I must become Son of God and God himself." (*Sermon*, VII, 23). "Understand who has given you to be Son of God, heir of Christ, and—to use a bold term—God himself." (*Ibid.*, XIV, 23)—"But this (the Kingdom of Heaven) consists, in my view, in nothing but the possession of what is most pure and most perfect. But the most perfect thing that exists is Knowledge of God." (*Ibid.*, XX, 12).

“all things were made” and without which “was not anything made that was made”.

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We have said previously that, in the human microcosm, only the Intellect “is” the Self, and not any specifically “mental” faculty. For just as a distinction has to be made between an ordinary creature and “the Word made flesh”, so also it is necessary to distinguish between rational thought, which is discursive and proceeds from the mental faculty alone, and intellective thought, which proceeds from intuition and pure Intellect: this second mode of thought is, in effect, an “exteriorisation resulting from an interiorisation”, whereas the first is purely and simply an expression resulting from manifestation as such. To rational thought there corresponds the infra-human world, production of the “cosmic brain”, and to intellective thought there corresponds the human species, expression of the “heart”; on a smaller scale and within the framework of humanity itself, it is the *Avatāra* who corresponds to this second mode of thought. The whole Christ-enacted drama, or the drama of Revelation unqualified, is thus pre-figured—or else “post-figured”, according to the point of view—in the intellectual act, either in the original intellection itself or in unitive meditation; this form of thought is like a “redemptive” or “unitive incarnation” of the Heart-Intellect. In other words, a distinction has to be made between terrestrial thought, aroused by the environment and finding its term within the environment, and celestial thought aroused by that which is our eternal substance and finding its term beyond ourselves and, in a final analysis, in the Self. Reason is something like a “profane intelligence”; essentially the profane point of view springs from there. It is necessary for reason to be determined, transfigured or regenerated, either by faith, or by gnosis which is the quintessence of faith.



Gnosis, by the very fact that it is a "knowing" and not a "willing", is centred in "that which is" and not in "that which ought to be"; from this there results a way of regarding the world and life greatly differing from the way, more "meritorious" perhaps but less "true", in which predominantly volitive minds regard the vicissitudes of existence. The background of the drama of life is, for the *bhakta*, the "Will of God" and, for the *jñāni*, the nature of things; the accepting of his fate results, for the former, from unconditional love, from "that which must be"; for the latter, acceptance results from discernment of metaphysical necessity, therefore, from "that which is". The *bhakta* accepts all fate as coming from the Beloved; he also accepts it because he makes no distinction between "me" and "others" and because, from this very fact, he cannot rebel against an event merely because it has happened to himself and not to some other person; if he accepts all from love of God, he also accepts, on that very basis, out of love of his neighbour. The attitude of the *jñāni*, on the other hand, is an impassibility founded upon discerning between Real and Unreal: "The world is false, *Brahma* is true"; "That art thou" (*Tat Tvam Asi*); "All is *Ātmā*"; "I am *Brahma*". Events of life arise, as do all phenomena, out of the indefinitely varying combinations of the three "cosmic qualities" (the *guṇas*: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*); these events then cannot not be, in such measure as the world is relatively real; but as soon as that relativity is transcended, they cease to exist and then there is no longer a "good" or an "evil", nor any karmic causation; the plane of the *guṇas* ("simultaneous" qualities) and of *karma* (made up of "successive" qualities) is as if annihilated in the undifferentiated serenity of Being or of the Self. And similarly, there is no "juridical" relationship between the astonishments, anxieties and indignations of the soul and the unconditional serenity of Intellect, or to be more precise, between the logic of disquiet and the

transcendence of dispassion; the gap is incommensurable and yet the second term is already there concealed within the first; it is, so to speak, already within reach.

In spiritual life, he who says "to will" says "to will Good"; "to will Good" is "to will well", that is to say to "will through the Good", or "through God"; instead of "to will" one could also say "to love" and instead of "the Good" one could say "the Beautiful". On the other hand, he who says "to know" says "to know that which is"; he who says "to know that which is", says, in a final analysis, "to be that which knows": the Self.

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Reference has been made to the "cosmic qualities", the *gunas*, and to *karma*, as well as to the dispassion which transcends all conditions of existence: this dispassion—or this deliverance—lies to some extent at the centre of existence like a kernel of peace and light; it is like a drop of redemptive spray in an ocean of flames. "The whole universe is on fire", said the Buddha; our misfortune lies in our not knowing that the substance of existence is fire, this substance into which we are woven while yet remaining alien bodies. For the "naive" and "unrepentant", the world is a neutral space from which he chooses the agreeable content while believing he has the power to avoid the disagreeable, provided he be clever enough and meets with good luck; but the man who does not know that existence is an immense brazier has no imperative reason for wanting to get out of it, and that is why an Arab proverb says, "The crown of wisdom is the fear of God"—that is to say, the fear of divine afflictions, which are the fatal price of our state of remoteness.

The kernel of light at the centre of the current of forms is essentially the "remembrance of God"—which in the end demands all that we are—as the words of Muhammad declare: "All that is to be found on earth is accursed, save only the

remembrance of God", and: "There is no fault greater than that of existing." "None is good but one: God", said Christ: this implies that what comes from God—His Name—and what leads to Him—remembering His Name—share in his goodness. The virtual fire through which we live withdraws from things to the extent that we are centred on the mystery of this remembering; things then become transparent and transmit to us the rays of their immutable and blessed archetypes. It could also be said that existence is fiery in so far as it is regarded as being outside God and, by this fact, it also leads to fire; it is a consuming blaze for the perverted will and illumination for the contemplative intelligence, and it is, thus, at once threat and "consolation", enslaving seduction and liberating vision. It is the changeless and blessed archetypes that man is seeking (did he but know it) when he attaches himself to shadows here below; and he suffers cruelly, first when these shadows disappear and later when, at death, he perceives the archetypes, from which his love for shadows had turned him away.<sup>1</sup>

In its global reality, Existence is serene and not maleficent; the cosmic Wrath is reabsorbed in total and virginal Equilibrium—Existence in itself is the universal Virgin who conquers, by her purity as also by her mercy, the sin of the demiurgic Eve, the bringer forth of creatures and of passions; Eve, who brings forth, seduces and attaches, is "eternally" conquered by the Virgin who purifies, pardons and sets free.

For gnosis, the existential fire is inseparable from ignorance and so from illusion. The fundamental cause of illusion or of ignorance is not however our state of fall nor some deficiency of the existential substance, but the principle of objectivation, by which the pole of "being" is cut off from the pure Subject; seen from this angle, the universal Virgin

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<sup>1</sup> Music—like dancing—is the art of bringing terrestrial shadows back to celestial vibrations and divine archetypes. In the plastic arts an analogous function is performed by stylisation.

also is "illusory", and even Being is illusory in so far as it is distinct from the supra-ontological Subject which is the Self.<sup>1</sup> But Existence and Being, even if they also belong to the realm of *Māyā*, nonetheless remain beyond the current of forms, and in consequence beyond separation, suffering and death.

Gnosis, it must be repeated, is our participation—which may be quite precarious and conditional, yet is nonetheless possible since we could not be in every respect absolutely "distinct" from God, otherwise we should be devoid of reality—gnosis, then, is our participation in the "perspective" of the divine Subject which, in turn, dwells beyond the separative polarity, "subject-object", which however in no way signifies that it does not carry in itself, in a manner conforming with its Essence, the cause of all cosmic polarisations; that is to say, something like a polarity can indeed be discerned in it, but only on condition of not seeing there any separation or opposition.

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The Absolute Subject carries its own immediate and connatural Object within itself and that Object is infinite Blessedness. When the Hindu doctrine describes *Ātmā* as being made up of "Being", "Consciousness" and "Bliss" (*Sat, Cit, Ānanda*, whence the divine Name *Saccidānanda*) this enumeration means that the subject is "Being that knows, having Bliss for object": "being", or "being real"—this is Consciousness of all its own possibilities; needless to say, the use of the verb "to be" here is quite provisional, since the Self is situated beyond ontological Unity. Now, the world is as it were included in the divine Beatitude, or more precisely, it is as if included in Being which, for its part, is so to speak the "external" dimension of Bliss or of Self; we say "external"

<sup>1</sup> In Eckhart, Silesius, Omar Khayyam and others, allusions are found to this "relativity" of Being in relation to the Self. In the doctrines of India and the Far East—in *Advaita Vedānta*, Mahāyāna Buddhism and Taoism—this idea is fundamental.

inasmuch as we place ourselves at the standpoint of the world, which is the human standpoint, since it goes without saying that there is no kind of "exteriority" in the Infinite. That is why it is said in theology that God has created the world "by goodness": "love" and "goodness", as also "beauty" are so many aspects of Bliss; this last is identified with All-Possibility. That the world is "contained" in the divine Bliss or Goodness means, in relation to suffering—even in hell—that the being always keeps the gift, positive in itself, of existence and that all suffering necessarily is limited in its nature and duration, God alone being absolute.

The subjective principle emanating from the divine Subject traverses the Universe like a ray in order to find its term in the multitude of *egos*. The formal world is characterised by the "exterior limits" of its contents, therefore by a kind of indefinite segmentation<sup>1</sup>: thus its "subjectivity" will be multiple, whence the innumerable diversity of souls. Man marks, for the terrestrial world that is his, the limit of the "creative ray"; man's sufficient cause is being this limit, that is to say, providing a stop, after the manner of an echo or a mirror, to the "ray of exteriorisation" of the Self; thus the human state is a gate of exit—and the only gate for the terrestrial world—not merely out of this world or the formal cosmos, but even out of the immense and numberless objectivation that is universal Existence; since it is a total microcosm, a "plenary I"<sup>2</sup>, the state of man is at the same time a door open towards the Self and immortality.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In the formless or supra-formal world, which is the realm of the angelic states, all things are perceived as subsisting "in the interior" of the subject, differences among the angelic subjects being marked by their modes of perception.

<sup>2</sup> And not a partial "I" such as is, for instance, an animal *ego*.

<sup>3</sup> Is there any immortality outside the Self? Yes and no. There is also paradisaical immortality, but the latter "comes to an end"—"upwards"—in the final reintegration (the *mahāpralaya* of the Hindus, or end

In one of his hymns to *Hari*, Śrī Śaṅkarācārya says: "Lord, although I and Thou make but One, I belong to Thee, but not Thou to me, just as the waves belong to the sea, but not the sea to the waves." And in another hymn, Śaṅkara expresses himself thus: "That which is the ceasing of mental agitation and supreme peacefulness; that which is the lake *Maṇikarnika* and pilgrimage *par excellence*; that which is the primordial, most pure Ganges, the river of Knowledge; this it is which is Benares, inborn Wisdom, and this it is which I am."

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of a "day of *Brahmā*") of Existence in the Self; but this ending, precisely, is a "more" and not a "less", a "fulfilling" *in divinis* and not an "abolition".



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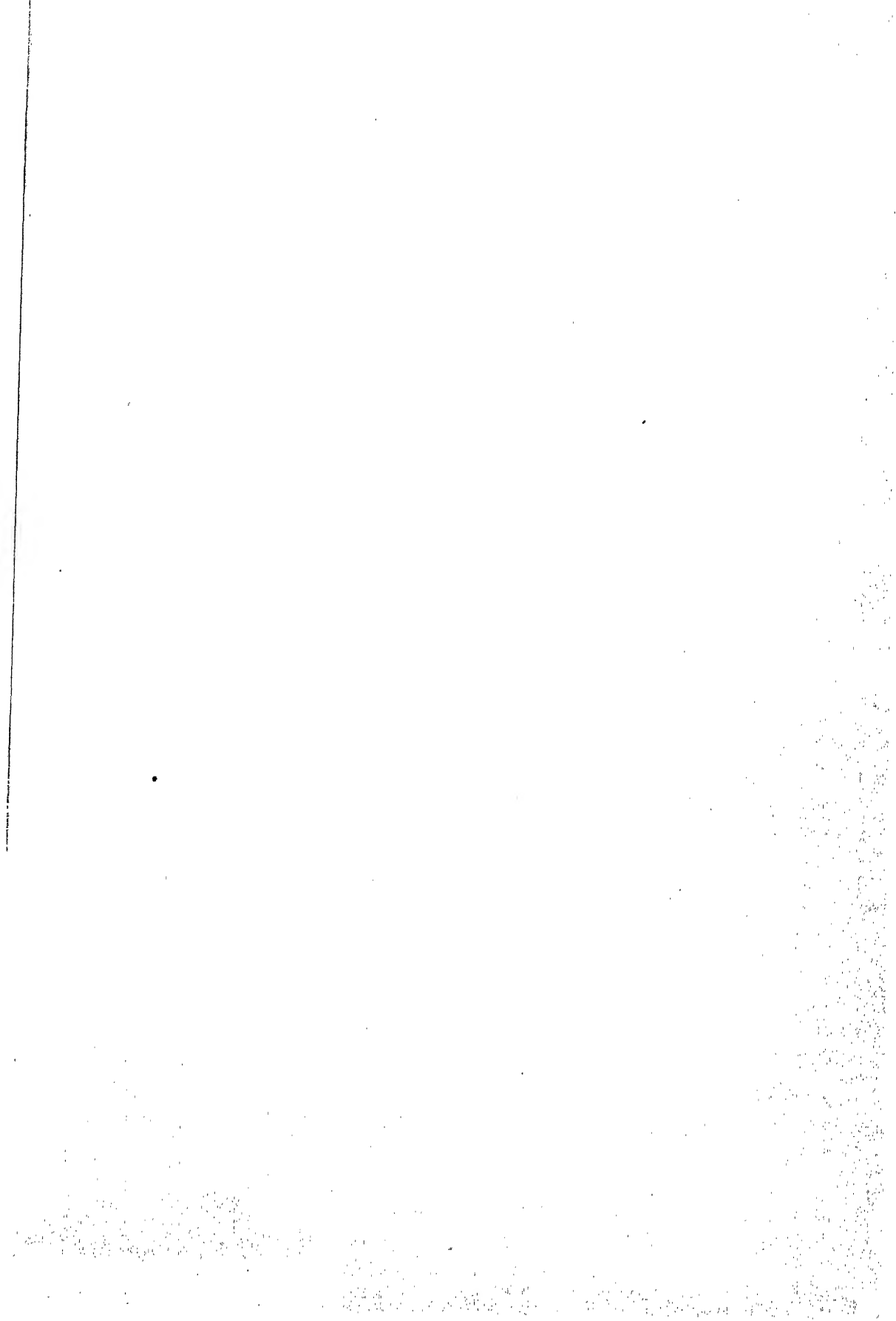
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